



**Diocese of Toowoomba  
Catholic Schools**

# **St Maria Goretti School Inglewood**

**Quadrennial school review  
June 2018**



**School renewal and improvement  
Quadrennial school review 2018**



## Foreword

Although much has been written about school reform in past decades — national reports, studies, descriptions of findings — insufficient attention has been given to the important relationships among the adults within the school, and to a consideration of how the abundant untapped energy, inventiveness and idealism within the school might be encouraged.

Roland Barth, Harvard Graduate School of Education

The philosophical approach to the review is based on Appreciative Inquiry, a well-established approach used by organisations varying from international corporations to not-for-profit social organisations. Appreciative Inquiry begins with the assumption that there are good things happening in the organisation and identifying these. It then moves to what people see as areas needing attention, improvement or change. The key principle is that these are placed in the context of what the organisation does well, so it moves beyond a problem-solving agenda to an improvement agenda.

Appreciative Inquiry aims to bring ownership to the school. The review team hears 'the story' of the School through its stakeholders, and this informs the key findings and improvement strategies that the review team has recommended. Exactly how the School addresses the key findings and improvement strategies is left for the school to determine, but it is mandatory for the school to address them over the following four years.

# Methodology

The review was conducted from Tuesday 12 June to Thursday 14 June 2018

## Reviewers

Insert names and positions of reviewers here

Suzanne Cavanagh, Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office (TCSO) Senior Education Leader (SEL), Chair

Jim Midgley, TCSO Director: Teaching and learning

Luke Barrett, Principal: St Joseph's School, Millmerran

The review consisted of structured interviews of the following school community members:

- Principal: Mrs Paula O'Rourke
- Teachers: Miss Casey Sly, Miss Olivia McNamara, Mrs Maree Twidale
- Support Staff: Mrs Naomi Smith, Mrs Zala Smith, Mrs Mandy Mead
- Students (5 & 6 Leaders)
- Parents: Mr Mike Price (PPF President), Mrs Carly Trevisiol, Mrs Leoni Garland,
- Parish Priest (Fr Sean Lynskey)

## Excellence in Catholic Education

The reference document for the review was 10 October 2017 draft of the 'Excellence in Catholic Education Domains and Components'. A supporting background document was the seven principles of the 'Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office Excellence in Catholic Education'.

### Domain 1: Mission and Identity

- 1.1 Religion Curriculum
- 1.2 Religious Life of the School

### Domain 2: Teaching and Learning

- 2.1 Students and their Learning
- 2.2 Curriculum Structure and Provision
- 2.3 Pastoral Care and Student Wellbeing

### Domain 3: Continual Renewal

- 3.1 School Improvement Culture
- 3.2 Community Partnerships

### Domain 4: Sustainable Resourcing and Stewardship

- 4.1 Staff Development and Wellbeing
- 4.2 Use of Resources Facilities and the Learning Environment

## Prologue

St Maria Goretti School is a welcoming, caring and positive community. The students, staff and parents are proud of their school and rate it highly as a community of care that is inclusive and outreaching.

St Maria Goretti School has a commitment to building strong positive relationships within the school and the wider community. The school links with external groups such as the local Kindy for reading and regularly connects with neighbouring schools for extra curricula opportunities such as sports carnivals, Arts Council and cultural celebrations such as NAIDOC week. There is a strong presence from all staff and students at community events. The students display a willingness to assist at such events and receive recognition for wanting to participate. Many of those interviewed believe that this significant level of involvement has raised the reputation and profile of the school in the community.

All people interviewed praised the enthusiasm of the teaching staff, their commitment to live in the town and having a presence in the community. The staff see themselves functioning as a team, looking out for one another and working to improve the teaching and learning and student achievement.

While the school is student centric ensuring that learning is specific to student needs, it also celebrates the achievements of students. The academic progress and profile of the school has increased overtime due to a strategic focus on developing consistent teaching and learning opportunities.

It is noted that the Catholic ethos of St Maria Goretti School is very strong with a community that is keen to engage socially and spiritually.

There is an energy and air of optimism at St Maria Goretti that is shared by students, parents and staff.

## Domain 1: Mission and Identity

### 1.1 Religion curriculum

***“At St Maria Goretti you live the values and morals of the Catholic School – it shows through the students” Staff member & Parent***

#### Findings

The school's Religion Learning Area Program (LAP) is well developed and sequenced. Each teacher has a hard copy of the school's curriculum plan to use and reference. This includes and references the dimensions of Catholic Identity – Attentiveness to the Life Giving Presence of God, Ministry within the Church, Place of Learning, Community of Care, Inclusive and Outreaching Culture and Continuous Improvement through Renewal.

The teachers report on Religious curriculum knowledge and use the Diocesan Learning Profile (DLP) to record the planned units and children's assessment. Each term teachers access personnel from the Directorate of Mission and Identity to assist them with planning and assessment.

Due to the early career stage of the two classroom teachers and the nature of the provision of planning and preparation time allocated to staff, the school Principal is currently the main driver of the Religion Curriculum. The School Principal is also in the position of Assistant Principal Religious Education.

#### Improvement strategies

Continue to build early career teacher knowledge and capacity in the area of the teaching of religion by having experienced religious educators model teaching and provide feedback to them following lesson observations or classroom walkthroughs.

### 1.2 Religious life of the school

***“Catholic Schools are the greatest assets of the Catholic Church” Fr Sean Lynskey***

#### Findings

##### *Evangelisation and Formation*

The school gathers together to worship on a regular basis. Liturgy is celebrated with the Parish once a term on a weekend and again during the school week. Students and their families play a significant part in these liturgical celebrations and these are well viewed by the priest, parents and staff.

Liturgical celebrations are timetabled each term and dates published so that members of the wider community can attend.

The school acknowledges the attitude and behaviour of the students reflecting the values and mission of the school with the Saint Mary Mackillop Awards. These awards are presented annually to students who have demonstrated behaviour that aligns with the values of Saint Mary Mackillop.

The Parish School connection is very strong and positive. The Principal plays an active role in the faith life of the Parish, supporting the Priest and the Parish by holding roles such as Parish Council Secretary and being a member of the Parish Council Finance Committee. The school currently prints the Parish Bulletin each week for distribution at Mass on the weekend. Community members commend the Principal for being an obvious model of a faith leader. *“She lives and models the life of Jesus”.*

##### *Prayer and Worship*

Religious symbols and artefacts are in evidence around the school. Prayer tables, crucifixes and other religious icons and symbols made by students are on display in classrooms and elsewhere throughout the school. Of particular note is the white marble statue of St Mary Mackillop (with two children) which was donated by Sister Marie Dowling, a former Principal and past Inglewood resident.

Prayer is shared with one another at whole school assemblies, in the classroom before meal breaks and at the beginning and end of each day. Staff lead one another in prayer each week (although this will often default to the Principal) prior to the Staff Meeting. The student leaders lead the School Assemblies in prayer each week.

The Principal acknowledges members of the school community at Assemblies with a blessing that addresses their specific needs (ie illness, new baby etc). Every new student and staff member is welcomed at the School Assembly with a blessing, the school badge and a personal message from the principal handwritten on a St Maria Goretti card.

### *Social Action and Justice*

The students of St Maria Goretti involve themselves in a variety of outreach activities in the town. The Year 6 students attend Casa Mia (home for the aged), read with the local Kindy, work at the Biggest Morning Tea with the local community and assist with catering at the Blue Light Disco. Comments were made around the students reaching out to beyond their local community to support social justice issues.

### **Improvement strategies**

Reconsider the regularity of the St Mary Mackillop awards to be presented monthly at assemblies. Explore ways in which all staff can access prayer time so that they can participate and share the leadership with one another.

Consider other ways in which students can outreach and connect via a social justice lens to a much wider community.

## **Domain 2: Teaching and Learning**

### **2.1 Students and their learning**

*"In this school, everyone does the best they can in every area."* (parent)

### **FINDINGS**

St Maria Goretti Primary School students are exuberant in their enthusiasm for learning and in their descriptions of life in this primary school in Inglewood. Students and parents express an appreciation for 'their' school and frequently commented on the disappointment of having to leave at the end of grade 6.

### **Explicit improvement agenda**

The panel was presented with a succinct recent history on the school context and the strategic plans and associated goals, strategies and achievement levels for each year up to and including 2018. Each year has had an explicit improvement agenda, and in most instances, these plans have had a significant positive impact on the standards achieved over the last 5 years. In all years since 2014 the school has exceeded national averages when comparing relative gain from year three to five.

It is difficult in small remote schools to maintain constant improvement with the regular turnover of teachers. The Principal is to be commended on the quality of induction processes and the clear and explicit manner in which expectations around curriculum, pedagogy, planning and assessment are shared with new teachers every year.

The community feels they are well informed about student learning achievement from a whole school perspective. This is communicated at Parent Partnership Forums. Teaching staff are becoming more familiar with the reading improvement strategy (RIS) monitoring tools and the value of this data in tracking student progress. Families and students are confident with their progress without being familiar with targets and expectations.



## **Analysis and discussion of data**

The school has developed and has implemented a process (data wall) for the systematic collection of achievement and tracking data in reading which is analysed, summarised and discussed among teachers and leadership.

The Reading Improvement Strategy monitoring tools are in the early stages of implementation and are yet to be fully understood and utilized by teachers.

The school has recorded a significant increase in parent participation in RADii data gathering. This data is considered and noted in strategic planning decisions and general communications.

## **Learning culture**

Students report that learning is fun and that teachers care about them. New arrivals say that teachers are kinder than other schools they have experienced.

Parents and teachers commented that school officer hours have declined. Staff acknowledge that Multi-age classes are complex and require a significant degree of organizing and planning ability. Multiage classes have significant advantages in allowing the fluidity of movement across the year levels. St Maria Goretti teachers recognize that high achieving students in lower grades are advantaged and low achieving students in higher grades have their needs met without obvious distinction. The school LAPS and curriculum documents presented demonstrate how these expectations are to be met.

Students are aware of who needs support and who gives that support. High achieving students are expected to do more independent work. These students feel they are responsible for their own learning, a positive thing, they are seeking a structure or organizational arrangement, so they know where they are heading and can monitor and evaluate their progress.

Students in upper grades seek more structured routines and mechanisms that provide opportunity for feedback, what to learn next and how to improve.

School Officers are valued and committed to the achievement of the students. The notion of teaching teams (Teachers and School Officers working together) is widely accepted and appreciated. While acknowledging this the Principal is also aware of the necessity for teacher centrality in the learning process for all students. The balance between experienced school officers and inexperienced teachers can be a complicated situation and not that unusual in smaller remote schools. It is primarily the teacher's responsibility to ensure each student receives the opportunity to grow by at least 12 months of learning and to provide opportunity for this to occur.

Parents and teachers expressed concern that the learning support teacher (LST), with less hours available in 2018, is frequently inhibited with paper work and teachers would like more time with her to work in the classroom supporting students. While only one student is verified, the LST allocation is limited to the enrolment numbers formula.

The Reading Improvement Strategy needs to be consistently implemented across the classes ensuring that all student needs are being met through planned focused instruction using the designated high impact strategies, in the classroom, with teacher lead groupings for guided reading for all students. Clarity and consistency is required if students with critical reading needs are withdrawn from the classroom (Macqlit and Minilit).

## **Improvement strategies**

Consider innovative ways to support early career teachers as this will be an ongoing characteristic of staffing composition at St Maria Goretti School. In addition to the current schoolbased checklists and curriculum packages, establish personalised processes of professional support with emphasis on optimal levels of modelled teaching, planning and the provision of feedback.

We believe this community has the potential to lead research in the establishment of early career teacher support.

Consult with the Reading coach and the RIS team on more Professional development in analyzing and interpreting the RIS data and how the analysis may contribute to decisions about focused instruction. Use this knowledge to determine focused instruction in guided reading and groupings and to monitor students who are on track with reading targets.

Clarify to the wider community the staffing schedule formula and determining factors that affect additional funding. Particular attention is required to explain the hours allocated to the Learning Support area staffing. There has been a reliance of school officer time to achieve this in the past. As the level of needs of students changes with enrolments, often hours available fluctuate accordingly.

Consider ways to communicate the positive aspects of Multiage grouping. Highlight the ease with which students can have their learning needs met through simple organizational arrangements. Differentiation is achievable through the fluidity of movement in groupings.

Investigate Visible Learning strategies and structures that promote student independence. Students have to know what they are learning, how they are learning it and how they will know they have learnt it and what to do next. Visible scaffolding is required for students to function at this level.

Explicit expectations around how teaching teams operate, and the importance of teacher centrality should be documented. St Maria Goretti School could be a Diocesan leader in addressing this issue which is present in many schools.

Ensure Class Teachers remain central in directing all student learning. Learning Support Teachers and School Officers must utilise communication structures to ensure Class Teachers are well informed about the progress of readers in intensive support groups (students at critical reading levels). The Reading Improvement Strategy focuses on quality evidence based high impact reading instruction in every classroom. Small group, focused teaching, together with guided reading build, reinforce and extend reading skills for all students. Structured intervention programs are one effective resource when intervening with low progress readers. They are however, most effective when they are closely linked to the classroom program. Students with learning difficulties require explicit instruction, not only in acquiring reading skills, but also in how to generalise the skills learnt in intervention, into their daily reading and writing in the mainstream setting. Class Teachers, Learning Support Teachers and School Officers have a responsibility to assist students in making the connection between their intervention sessions and their work in their classroom.

## **2.2 Curriculum structure and provision**

### **Findings**

#### **Systematic curriculum delivery**

The school has an explicit, coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery across the years of school which makes clear what teachers should teach and students should learn. New teachers are presented with scope and sequence documents clearly describing what is to be learned in each year level in each multi-age class.

Report cards meet system requirements by providing course descriptions and a clear indication that teachers know the learners well. Social learnings and general comments give parents a clear idea of their child's academic progress and future goals. Parents also report that teachers have regular informal discussions on student progress and well-being. Reports are one method of parental engagement in a child's learning.



Teachers are provided with documentation to enable them to be aware of the curriculum requirements for each year level. As is often the case with early career teachers, the progressions in learning and how to scaffold them sequentially is an ongoing development objective.

The principal has used Professional Learning Communities in recent years to engage consultants to address strategic learning goals. The engagement of teachers in these PLCs has impacted positively on student achievement through effective professional learning opportunities.

Technology is readily available to support and accelerate learning. Students have one-on-one device access and follow the Technology learning area progressions.

### **Improvement strategies**

Consider how the shadow that lies between intentions and expectations around curriculum delivery and the actual chalk face reality can be decreased. Early career teachers require regular walkthroughs and constant feedback on pedagogy, organization and planning. Consult with the Senior Education Leader about additional funding sources to support mentoring and feedback.

Access existing frameworks around early teacher development (AITSL standards), or design and construct contextual processes to assist early career teachers with goal setting and capacity building.

## **2.3 Pastoral care and student wellbeing**

***“We have lots of friends at school – everybody is one!” (Year 5 student)***

### **Findings**

#### *Student social and emotional wellbeing*

The students at St Maria Goretti present as happy and confident. They engage with one another with warmth and friendliness, looking out for each other on the playground. There is a strong feeling of belonging and welcoming in this community. Students new to the school describe the friendliness of the staff and of their students as being distinctive to this community and different from their previous schools. All children interviewed commented strongly that *“there was no bullying or fighting at this school.”* The students also mentioned the sense of inclusivity in the playground and the opportunities to join in games already being played.

#### *Relationships*

The parents, staff and students all spoke highly of the positive relationships that currently exist in the school community. The parents comment on how happy the children are in the school and the survey data reflects this perspective. The staff have worked hard to ensure that each student is known to them and really “seen”.

The parents and staff work together in a positive way to put the student’s needs first and to ensure those needs are being met through additional support and the provision of intervention strategies.

#### *Effectiveness of systems and structures*

The students feel safe and happy at school. The protocols in place to assist students and staff to monitor student and staff pastoral care and wellbeing are well established and followed. The enrolment number of the school allows for each student to be known to the Principal and staff. Parents and carers are grateful for this relationship which allows for appropriate support to be offered on an individual basis. One parent noted *“If it wasn’t for this school, xxxx would have slipped through the system.”* The Principal noted that a more regular presence of a school counsellor will allow a more consistent application of positive approaches to problem solving (in wellbeing) across the whole school.

## Improvement strategies

Consider a whole school approach to wellbeing and pastoral care that can be managed and supported through the regular presence of a school counsellor.

## Domain 3: Continual renewal

### 3.1 School improvement culture

#### Findings

From the presented reports, there is a clear agenda of improvement culture within the school. Data informs the plans for the year and aspirational goals and targets are developed. Teachers take ownership of the improvement agenda and know what goals they are working towards. As mentioned previously, clarity around student expectations and the learning process needs to occur so that students can share in the ownership of their learning and what goals they are aiming to achieve. Students are seeking a structure or organisational arrangement, so they know where they are heading and can monitor and evaluate their progress.

Students in upper grades seek more structured routines and mechanisms that provide opportunity for feedback, what to learn next and how to improve. (From Section 2.1)

There is a clear progression of goals from year to year and they build upon the work from previous Annual Action Plans. It is clearly visible that Teaching & Learning has a strong focus particularly in the areas of Literacy. NAPLAN data and whole school data is used as evidence for the goals and improvement agenda. Targeted use of high yield strategies has been strategic and developed and implemented over time.

A regular statement that was present throughout this review was how much the school community appreciates the “community mindedness” of the classroom teachers and staff. Everyone noted that they have a real presence within the community, that their energy and positivity is an asset to the school and the wider community. There is a genuine presence of high staff and student morale at St Maria Goretti and this has been an area of improvement noted in school improvement surveys.

It was identified by staff that the Principal takes on a lot of additional tasks and workload to try and reduce the amount of work being put onto the teachers. The reason identified behind this is so that the teachers can concentrate on teaching and learning and the operation of their classes. It was noted that some staff would like to share this load and have tasks delegated to them, so they can contribute further to the school as well as having ownership around school events such as NAIDOC, Athletics and others.

#### Improvement strategies

Develop a set of learning dispositions for students, framed around the statement “What does a SMG learner look like”. The Learning dispositions will become the way in which all students will be taught at St Maria Goretti, regardless of teacher turnover. The Learning dispositions will embed the high yield strategies into the curriculum, planning and classroom process.

Explore opportunities to delegate tasks to staff to build their capacity and ownership of events within the school

## 3.2 Community partnerships

***“St Maria Goretti is regarded well by the community. Children who leave here get good feedback from other schools – academically and morally” (Grandparent)***

### Findings

It was very evident from all sources that St Maria Goretti School is a very welcoming, caring and positive community. It was clear that the students, staff and parents are proud of their school and rate it highly as a community of care, inclusive and outreaching.

#### *Partners*

One of the strengths that came through from the evidence was St Maria Goretti School's commitment to building strong positive relationships within the school and wider community. The school links with external groups such as the local Kindy for reading, regularly links with neighbouring schools for extra curricula opportunities such as sports carnivals, Arts Council and cultural celebrations such as NAIDOC week. There is a strong presence from all staff and students at community events and students display a willingness to assist at such events. Many of those interviewed believe that this significant level of involvement has raised the reputation and profile of the school in the community.

One initiative that has helped raise the profile of the school and is attracting future enrolments is the Under 5's morning in which children from the local community will participate in various activities as an experience of school. Activities range from reading with a teacher and existing students, basic numeracy to gross and fine motor skills. Respondents were full of praise for the Under 5's initiative.

The establishment of the School's Facebook page has allowed the school's ethos to be promoted in the wider community and once again has contributed to raising the profile of St Maria Goretti School. The School has worked hard to promote itself to build enrolments through various medium such as mailbox drops, local newsletter, promotional flyer etc. It is important to continue this active marketing program.

St Maria Goretti School Parent Partnership Forum is a newly established group being trialed this year. Early feedback points to success by reducing duplication of meetings and information sharing. Comment has been made that the same people are still involved as previous members of the School Board and Parents & Friends Association. It is hoped that more parents will be attracted to and involved in this Forum.

#### *Student Needs*

Relationships with external allied health services requires clarification. Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office support is available and accessed regularly. St Maria Goretti School is a trial school for the Diocesan expectation around Planning for Personalised Learning process which takes the place of previous planning and accountability requirements.

### Improvement strategies

Continue the Under 5's program and focus on making it sustainable. This program is widely viewed as necessary for the school in terms of future enrolments. Consider from a marketing perspective “the point of difference” to celebrate and promote as an enrolment incentive (what is different/better at St MG?). Engage with the Marketing and Public Relations Officer at the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office.

Monitor the effectiveness and success of the Parent Partnership Forum as a trial school. Feedback to the wider community any actions and decisions that arise from this new group.

## Domain 4: Sustainable resourcing and stewardship

### 4.1 Staff development and wellbeing

#### Findings

It was evident from the interviews that there was a need for ongoing mentoring and support for early career teachers. The summary of class structures and teacher allocations were presented from 2014 to present and over that time St Maria Goretti School has had 5 early career teachers for 3 out of the 5 years. It was raised in multiple interviews of both school officers and teachers that the teachers require ongoing mentoring and support in the early stages of their careers.

It was acknowledged by the respondents that formalised support programs have occurred previously, but the model of mentoring is different from previous years.

From the data presented it is highly likely that the trend of employing early career teachers will be the norm for St Maria Goretti School moving forward. As previously recommended, appropriate processes should be documented to support the staff to provide consistency at the beginning teacher phase of their career. It is noted that the Principal provides release time for the mentoring of beginning teachers.

#### Improvement strategies

Investigate ways in which early career teachers can connect with and be mentored by experienced teachers within the Diocese through formalised mentoring programs and school-initiated programs.

### 4.2 Use of resources, facilities and the learning environment

#### Findings

It was highly visible that the school is well resourced and that it has well maintained facilities. Teachers parents and students commented on the quality of resources that exist at the School. Scheduled maintenance occurs, and key improvements are prioritised. The learning environments are well resourced and maintained for the students.

From the interviews, it was evident that the school staff appreciate the resources and that they are targeted to the needs of the students. It was evident through the Annual Action Plan and School goals that resourcing was targeted to specific Professional Development, support and staffing. As the student numbers have changed over the years, the resourcing has reflected this and has been focused on making the most out of the availability of funds/grants and personnel. From the Parent RADII (Research Australia Development Innovation Institute) data, there was a number of respondents (greater than 50% over 2 years) who strongly agreed that *“the school has good facilities, grounds, buildings and outdoor facilities are kept in good condition and the school is well equipped with teaching & learning resources.”* This was echoed in the staff response.

The EiCE (Excellence in Catholic Education) & RADII data also reflected the high levels of accountability and communication around financial management and the allocation of resources, though some respondents noted that higher levels of communication around decision making needs to be more transparent. Interviews in this review process with staff and parents would support a desire to be involved or understanding of decisions made in the allocation of resources.

## Epilogue

St Maria Goretti School is a school that has much to celebrate. The parents and students have praised the staff for their enthusiasm and commitment to the local community. The staff have provided energy and focus to working as a team to improve student achievement. Parents appreciate the Principal and teachers for their dedication and application to improve St Maria Goretti's standing in the township and the academic growth and achievements of the students.

The Principal acknowledges her key role in leading, supporting and retaining good teaching staff while recognising the likelihood that St Maria Goretti School will always host early career teachers. This recognition requires a consistent program of support that includes mentoring and use of resources (including experienced teachers at other schools) that may extend to include other schools in the Toowoomba Diocese.

The students believe that the school is a safe and happy place where good teaching occurs. They are challenged in the classroom and feel accommodated into any game in the playground. This feeling of welcome and inclusivity should continue to be nurtured through the skills of the school counsellor working with the school staff and students.

The challenge for the future lies in growing enrolments and meeting the needs of the staff and students. As a small school, St Maria Goretti has a rich history of multi-age classes. The benefits of knowing each student as a person and a learner should be celebrated and communicated to parents highlighting challenges and goals.

The Inglewood Parish embraces the liturgical celebrations of the school and encourages participation at every level. The school Principal is acknowledged as a key member of the parish and pivotal to several committees. She is seen as the Religious Leader of the school and instrumental in maintaining and nurturing the Mission and Identity of the wider school community.

St Maria Goretti School has a strong sense of community that highlights positive relationships and learning. This is having a positive effect on the school's profile in the town and bringing a sense of assuredness to the staff and parents.