



PRINCIPAL'S ANNUAL REPORT 2015

As another year draws to a close, it is timely to reflect on the celebrations and occasions which highlighted the year at St Rita's School. We have had an eventful year, with enrolments fluctuating as families moved into the district and others have moved on to other schools. Fortunately, I successfully applied for Over-allocation of classroom teachers late last year, and could once again have planned for three multi-age classes in the school for 2016.

CURRICULUM

The implementation of the Australian Curriculum in English, Maths, Science, History and Geography has continued this year. We were excited to have Ms Hayley Bowie join our staff as our P.E. specialist teacher, and the students were taught units from the newly accredited H.P.E. Learning Area Plan. As Literacy Enrichment Teacher, Mrs Bernadette Anthony competently mentored teachers in the area of English as well as assisted with the successful implementation of the PM Guided Writing pedagogy.

Our special event, Science Day, was an enjoyable and worthwhile learning experience for all students. The continuation of the Perceptual Motor Program for the Prep – Year 3s saw marked improvement in the physical skills of gross motor, balance and coordination for these young children. Involvement in the Mulgrave District Sports Association saw our students from 9 – 12 years competing in the Cross Country and Track & Field sporting carnivals with children from other schools in the Babinda district.



Throughout the year, teachers participated in extensive Professional Development sessions after school and on weekends. By attending PD, teachers are enthusiastically committed to developing their teaching skills so as to deliver the most effective teaching programs for students.

These sessions covered such interesting topics as 'Visible Learning', 'First Steps' Writing, 'First Steps' Oral Language, the teaching of grammar and spelling, Consistency of Teacher Judgment and 'Circle Solutions'. The teachers of St Rita's are to be commended for being life-long learners!

The school also participated in the diocesan *Literacy and Numeracy Coaching* initiative, which aimed at further supporting teachers with the teaching of Mathematics. With the introduction of a new classroom program, OXFORD 'Big Ideas', we engaged Ms Dot Shea, a Mathematics specialist, to assist with the revision of a whole school Maths plan and to model Maths lessons which focused on best pedagogy. Parents were also provided with practical workshop sessions on how to help with Mathematics at home.

In 2015, we once again implemented the *Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden* program for the Year 4, 5 and 6 students. In this program, the students have planted, harvested and cooked using produce from our own vegetable garden. SAKG has been a valuable and engaging learning program at our school, and Mrs Jenni Stone works enthusiastically to ensure its success. I thank the St Rita's P & F for again providing financial support to the *Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden* throughout the year.



Digital Learning continued to be a major focus for 2015 with the purchase of a set of cloud-based laptops, *Chromebooks*. These devices were used by the students in the Year 4/5/6 classroom and have been most effective for student learning. The take-home iPad program has continued to be a huge success, and all students in the Year 4/5/6 class were assigned an iPad from the beginning of the year to be used both in the classroom and at home. To further keep our students upskilled in a range of technological devices, *Chromebooks* will be introduced into the Year 2/3/4 classroom in 2016.



The culture of continual improvement in teaching and learning at St Rita's was once again reflected in our NAPLAN Testing results in English and Maths. Our individual students in Years 3 and 5 achieved very pleasing results in 2015, and the year level cohorts achieved above the Cairns Diocese, Queensland Catholic School, State School and National results. Congratulations St Rita's!

FAITH LIFE

The Religious Life of our school continued to be capably guided and nurtured by our new Assistant Principal (Religious Education) Mrs Bec Burns. Working with our Parish Priest, Father Kerry Crowley, Bec planned and organised the Religious Education and Social Emotional Learning programs, and prayer and liturgical celebrations throughout the year.

Religious Education lessons were taught in our classrooms using the Cairns Diocesan Religious Education curriculum, and class prayer, liturgies and Masses were significant features of our term calendars at St Rita's School. In 2016, a new Religious Education curriculum will be rolled out across the diocese, and staff will engage in professional development for its implementation in the new academic year.



We were excited to introduce Christian Meditation into all classrooms during the year, and students have benefitted from these short, regular sessions of meditation in the afternoon.

Another innovation was the development of a 'Community Carers' group of our senior students. This group provides an opportunity for the children to 'Walk the Talk' by engaging with the local community and demonstrating the Christian values that are foundational to the culture of St Rita's. The 'Community Carers' especially enjoyed their visits to the hospital this year.

COMMUNITY

Our school community was strengthened in 2015 with new staff, Mrs Bec Burns, Miss Hayley Bowie, Mrs Debbie Carrigan, Ms Julie Parker and the return to school by Mrs Julie Cross and Mrs Donna Lauridsen. Julie became ill at the beginning of the year and had to take leave for medical treatment. We welcomed Miss Tua Snowball to our staff as our Indigenous Liaison Officer and Mrs Carmel Parisi resumed her role as School Counsellor in Term 4. I wish Mrs Taryn Greenwood, who had job shared in the Year 2/3 class, all the best as she continues her career in Cairns.

I am proud to report that St Rita's has an extremely hard-working, dedicated and committed staff who worked collaboratively with each other and the Catholic Education Services Curriculum Team to provide an enriched, engaging learning environment for all students. Teachers and School Officers successfully completed goal-setting action plans at the start of the year to guide their professional and personal development.

Throughout the year, my aim to promote parent participation at St Rita's was embraced by our families who became enthusiastically involved in a multitude of ways:

- * Parent Information workshops in Mathematics & THRASS
- * Class Masses and liturgies
- * Mother's Day Pampering Afternoon

- * Sporting carnivals - Cross Country, Athletics and Swimming
- * Under 8s' Day & Science Day
- * St Rita's Community Fair
- * Babinda Harvest Festival
- * Working Bees, helping in classrooms and Tuckshop

I am extremely appreciative of the continued support and assistance given to the school by St Rita's families. The 2015 P & F Executive Committee must be congratulated on having a successful year of providing support to the school. The ladies have worked very well as a team and achieved targeted fundraising goals throughout the year. I am proud that we are a happy and thriving school community at St Rita's.

CULTURE

In 2015, we continued to develop a whole-school approach to building and maintaining positive learning relationships for students with the development of the *3Rs Whole School Positive Behaviour* program. In the 3Rs, our Rights and Responsibilities are aligned, so for every right that we have, there is an associated responsibility. Rules, the third 'R', are clearly and simply stated to guide the behavior of our students as we work and play together in a happy learning community.

The school values, *Learning, Respect, Community and Faith*, are explicitly taught in the Social and Emotional Learning lessons of 'Program Achieve'. Each term we have targeted social learning groups organised by our Counsellor, Mrs Carmel Parisi, working with classroom teachers.



Many opportunities were created for acknowledging and rewarding students for making good choices at school. 'Student of the Week' awards on assemblies, newsletter articles, fortnightly contributions to the Post-Ed feature of the Cairns Post newspaper and 'Good News' points with the Principal were awarded to many students throughout the year. Happy, enthusiastic students were busy learning in our classrooms.

BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES

Early in the year, the long-awaited bird-proofing of the Multi-Purpose Court was completed. We were very grateful for the financial assistance provided by Cairns Catholic Education Services to undertake this task, as the problem with pigeons soiling on the court was such a labour-intensive problem.

Painting of the Tuckshop was completed, providing a refreshed, well-organised facility for both the Tuckshop service and the SAKG cooking program. Air-conditioning of the Tuckshop will be undertaken in 2016 with the generous support of the Mellick Centre in Innisfail.

This year, a Grant Application was written by the P & F representative, Mrs Julie Godden, for the purchase of musical instruments. At this stage, we are yet to hear as to the success of this application. I hope to proceed with my vision to provide a new playground for our Prep - Year 2 students next year, as this piece of equipment was erected in 1994 and is quite outdated and lacking in challenge for our young students.

What a productive year we have had at St Rita's! We have achieved our goals, completed a very successful re-accreditation by the *Non-State Schools Accreditation Board* and made solid plans for St Rita's for the next academic year. Innovations for next year include the introduction of Mandarin lessons for the Year 5/6 class and the celebration of St Rita's Feast Day in May as a Babinda community event. I am very much looking forward to my next year at St Rita's Babinda.

Yours in teaching,

Judy Billiau

Principal St Rita's School Babinda