



2025

Annual Report to the School Community



Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School

18 Box Street, MERBEIN 3505

Principal: Narelle Gallagher

Web: www.olshmerbein.catholic.edu.au

Registration: 1277, E Number: E2046

Principal's Attestation

I, Narelle Gallagher, attest that Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School is compliant with:

- The minimum standards and other requirements for school registration and school boarding premises (if applicable) as specified in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) and the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic).
- Australian Government accountability requirements related to the 2025 school year under the Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth) and the Australian Education Regulations 2023 (Cth).
- The Child Safe Standards as prescribed in Ministerial Order 1359 – Implementing the Child Safe Standards, Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises.

Attested on 13 May 2026

About this report

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School is registered by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA). The Annual Report to the School Community (ARSC), provides parents and the wider community with information about the school's activities and achievements throughout the year including information about various aspects of school performance. The Report is supplementary to other forms of regular communication to the school community regarding initiatives, activities and programs which support the learning and wellbeing of its students. Further information about the contents of this Report may be obtained by contacting the School directly or by visiting the School's website. Information can also be obtained from the [My School website](#).

Governing Authority Report

From the Murray to the Sea, DOBCEL aims to realise a vision of the 'fullness of life for all' for more than 18,600 students across a community of 63 Catholic primary and secondary schools.

We began 2025 with an uplifting Mass led by Bishop Paul in a packed St Patrick's Cathedral. In his homily, Bishop Paul highlighted our mission as Catholic educators to pursue the fullness of life for every child in our care, reminding us to keep students, staff and mission at the centre of our work.

The January 2025 publication of the DOBCEL Strategy 2035 represents a pivotal moment for the DOBCEL community and marks an important phase in our ongoing development.

The main purpose of this 10-year strategy is to inspire the whole system to commit to and move towards a high performing system of Catholic schools. The system is strong and well-performing, but we can do better.

Underpinned by our Catholic Identity, the strategy identifies five strategic pillars that reflect primary areas of focus.

- Collaborative Cultures
- Engagement and Belonging
- School as Community
- Rich Pedagogical practices for Deeper Learning and Wellbeing
- Sustainable Stewardship

The strategy was co-designed with teachers, school leaders, non-teaching staff, students, parents and those working in Catholic Education Ballarat offices.

I had the great privilege of participating in these co-design sessions, which showcased the professionalism and passion of all those in our system that devote their working lives to provide a great education for our children and young people.

Therefore, it is only fitting that I record my sincere thanks to all of you. These are exciting times of opportunity for our community of schools, but it is only possible because of your extraordinary work and dedication.

Tom Sexton
Executive Director DOBCEL

Vision and Mission

Purpose Statement

We are a Catholic community that is welcoming and inspired by Jesus to influence each individual to reach his or her full potential. In partnership with our parish community, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Primary School will provide a comprehensive education by developing in all children the particular qualities which will enable them to contribute to the common good of all society. These qualities are based on the gospel values of: love, trust, dignity, respect, freedom, forgiveness, self-awareness and self discipline and are taught more explicitly through the values of Respect, Resilience and Responsibility.

Graduate Statement

We want our students to grow in faith, bring faith to life, develop a love of learning and be positive, resilient contributors to society.

School Overview

Our school is named for Mary, Mother of Jesus, and is a Catholic School of the Merbein parish. Our symbols of the grapes, vines and cross represent the link between our school and the community's dependence on the vines. This is reflected in John's Gospel - "I am the vine; you are the branches." (John 15:5) The motto of our school is "United We Educate." This is the basis of all that we do.

Merbein is a small town situated on the Murray River, 12 kilometres from Mildura. Surrounding the town are closely settled fruit blocks, which rely on irrigation. As well as fresh fruit, Merbein supplies the wine industry and also provides a market for citrus, nuts and other vegetables.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School was built through the determination of a small group of parishioners who saw the need for a Catholic Church and school in Merbein. After consultation with the parish priest in Mildura and the Bishop of Ballarat, parishioners Tom McCarthy and John Power Senior travelled the parish by horse and cart, looking for donations to fund the project. In 1927, a brick building was constructed to serve as both the parish church and the school.

In January 1928, the school opened and was staffed by three Sisters of Mercy, who travelled daily from Mildura to teach and provide educational opportunities to all those in the Merbein Community. "Educate people, and you will provide them with an opportunity for life." (Catherine McAuley - founder of the Sisters of Mercy). In the beginning, the school provided education for 60 students and, over time, buildings were added to cater for larger enrolments. Along with a staff of dedicated and committed lay teachers, the Sisters of Mercy continued their service to the school until 1998.

The first lay principal was appointed in 1999 and, since then, there have been three more lay principals. In 2017, the current principal, Mrs Narelle Gallagher, was appointed. Today, our school community is made up of town and rural families from both Victoria and New South Wales. In 2023, our parish joined that of St. Anne and Joachim as part of the Sunraysia Parish, which is based in Mildura. Approximately 30% of the 155 students enrolled at OLSH are Catholic, with the majority of other families not in faith.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart is focused on shaping well-rounded students who have the ability to explore and question the Catholic faith, and the spiritual growth of the individual is encouraged and supported through a comprehensive Religious Education program and participation in the life of the Church through Masses and Liturgies.

At OLSH we aim to develop a strong love of learning through an extensive curriculum, based on shared, evidence-based pedagogical practices. We continue to explore how our children learn best by recognising their individuality and work to give every child an opportunity to

shine. Given that we have approximately 26% of students who currently receive support through the NCCD, our Graduate and Purpose Statements are integral to our approach to educating our students.

Sitting alongside all learners are staff who are valued and appreciated, and who are encouraged to develop their teaching practices through a combination of professional learning and timely feedback from peers and instructors from outside our own school setting.

Principal's Report

As we come to the end of another busy and successful year at OLSH, I am grateful for the sense of community, perseverance, and joy that has been present in our school every day. We began the year with 154 students and will finish with 153, a wonderful indication of our stability and the trust our families continue to place in us.

Across all year levels, students have been learning with enthusiasm and forming strong and supportive friendships. Classroom learning has been complemented by a wide range of experiences - camps, excursions, sporting events, liturgies, and special activities - which have helped our students grow academically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

Our spiritual life has continued to flourish. Throughout the year we have celebrated masses and liturgies together, marked Mission Week with fundraising for Catholic Missions, and supported Project Compassion at Easter. Care for Our Common Home has been a key theme this year, with Laudato Si' driving our actions, reflected in our sustainability efforts. Students have worked hard to reduce rubbish, care for the environment, and nurture the vegetables that have been harvested and used for cooking in our garden program.

Staffing has remained steady throughout 2025. I am grateful to Mia Mottram and Judy Norton for continuing to share the role of Business Manager for most of the year, and we welcomed Carolyn Clementson back to the office in a part-time capacity in Term Three. We also farewelled Learning Support Officer Maritta at the end of Term One and wished her well as she moved on to new opportunities. At the end of this year, Michael Breewel will move on to other employment after more than 10 years at OLSH. We will be sad to see him go, but welcome Mrs Joanne Campbell to fill the position of Physical Education teacher and classroom support.

I would like to once again thank our staff, both teaching and non-teaching, for their ongoing work with our students. They continue to provide not only academic support and guidance but also assist our students to develop into individuals who can navigate challenges on their own, and to recognise when they need the help of others. Supported by Jo Finlayson, our student wellbeing continues to be a major focus and with our new Behaviour Support Process being introduced in early 2026, we hope to see the positive impact of Restorative Practice for our students.

We are very fortunate to have such beautiful and well-maintained grounds. The new playground installed late last year continues to be enjoyed daily, and the two new shade sails added over the decking area have provided much-needed shade for students during break times. This month we also filmed a promotional video for our website, which will help showcase our wonderful school environment and further enhance our reputation in the wider community.

Our School Advisory Council has met each term to discuss ideas and planning around matters that will benefit our school community. Although advisory in nature, the group provides thoughtful insight and valuable suggestions that support me in the day-to-day running of the school. I sincerely thank each member for their time, commitment, and care for our students. In 2026, we already have some great ideas for bringing our school community together.

Looking ahead, 2026 is shaping up to be another exciting year. We look forward to welcoming 24 new Prep students, and we continue to receive regular enquiries for other year levels—a positive sign that the future of OLSH is bright. We are also hoping that an application for Capital Funding (submitted in March) will be successful and will contribute to renovations of our staffroom and development of additional meeting spaces.

Thank you to our students, staff, families, and parish community for your support, trust, and partnership throughout the year. OLSH continues to be the welcoming, inclusive, faith-filled school it is because of you. I wish everyone a safe and restful holiday break and look forward to another wonderful year ahead.

Catholic Identity and Mission

Goals & Intended Outcomes

In this final year of our SIF, we retained our goal to continue to integrate Indigenous perspectives as part of our contemporary Catholic Identity.

Achievements

As always, OLSH held many masses and liturgies in 2025. These were well-attended by the community, including the parish, and provided meaningful opportunities for the students to practise their faith, given that a great many of our families do not have an active life in the church.

The Sacramental Program was celebrated by a small group of students and fundraising for Project Compassion at Easter and Caritas at Christmas (OLSH Giving Tree for St. Vincent de Paul) were a major focus. Mission Week created awareness about Catholic Missions and the students once again spent the week participating in activities to raise money for this cause.

Value Added

- Celebration of Catholic Education Week with all Sunraysia Catholic schools
- PL with Kim Hawkes
- OLSH Giving Tree at Christmas
- Mission activities and fundraising, including the Colour Run
- Project Compassion and Easter Liturgy
- Masses for Beginning of Year, Graduation, Grandparents' Day, Mission Week
- Liturgies to celebrate Ash Wednesday/Easter, NAIDOC week, Mother's Day
- Adding to our TAP hours through professional development (Fullness of Life PL).

Learning and Teaching

Goals & Intended Outcomes

As part of our Annual Action Plan goal of implementing the Structured Literacy Program as a school-wide approach, we journeyed into our third year of the program and completed our formal learning of the Structured Literacy pedagogy. At the conclusion of the year, we made the decision to become a Lighthouse School in 2026, which requires further formal commitment to the program through observations of our teaching practices and setting goals for improvement.

During the year, our focus was on the Writing element of Structured Literacy and on continuing to refine our practices in the elements already taught. While we can see definite improvements in our data in several areas of literacy, teachers felt they needed further instruction to implement the Writing component of the program effectively. Professional learning was geared toward meeting this need, with teachers working together with the Learning and Teaching Leader to improve practice.

In 2026, we aim to continue this improvement through feedback from the FLARE team as we work toward gaining our accreditation to be a Lighthouse School.

Setting protocols and engaging in professional learning to adopt best practice in the area of student engagement was a goal stemming from our SIF, and we aimed to do this by broadening our knowledge of Learner Agency and feedback through engagement in the James Anderson workshops on Learnership and Student Agency. Feedback would also form a part of this learning.

Achievements

By working through the online modules on each element of the Structured Literacy program and by attending two professional learning days, staff continued to modify and refine their teaching practices and also gain a better understanding of all modules covered.

Teachers implemented DIBELS assessments as part of the partnership between the SunLit Team (now FLARE) and La Trobe University and used the data to drive their teaching, resulting in great improvements in reading fluency, pace and comprehension. Small groups were established to work on areas of the DIBELS where students were struggling, and this showed extensive growth when assessment was completed again toward the year's end. PAT assessments continued to assist in triangulating data to form a clear picture of where our students sit.

A core and more approach was adopted so that all students, regardless of their learning level, could access the program during the literacy block but could also be supported in their literacy growth in small group work during other parts of the day.

Work was also done on the implementation of the Maths 2.0 curriculum (due by mid-2025) with teaching staff looking at the current curriculum and how it aligned with the new one. Using the Stepping Stones program has meant we have had to adjust our program slightly to align with the new curriculum.

Our staff joined those from Sacred Heart Primary, Mildura and St. Joseph's School in Red Cliffs at a James Anderson-run PL about Learnership, which started us off on our journey into this area. After school whole-staff workshops also formed a part of this learning throughout the year. By the year's end, students were using shared language relating to the Learning Zones and were able to identify what kind of learner they were.

Student Learning Outcomes

OLSH's 2025 NAPLAN results were similar to those of comparable schools in Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Numeracy for both Grade 3 and Grade 5. This was particularly pleasing as nearly all students participated in the assessments. In particular, the Grade 5 cohort includes nine students with Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) out of a total of 26 students. The growth data over time also shows that students have maintained their development across learning areas.

When compared to all schools, the main area identified for improvement was Spelling in Grade 5. This may reflect the school's strong focus on phonics through the Structured Literacy approach. Now in its third year, the Structured Literacy program sees the phonics component largely completed in Grade 3. To further support spelling development, an evidence-based Spelling Mastery program has been reintroduced once the phonics program is complete. This program focuses on spelling rules, the area highlighted by NAPLAN data, while also reinforcing students' phonics knowledge.

NAPLAN - Proportion of students meeting the proficient standards					
	2025 (current year)			2-Year Average	
Domain	Year level	Mean Scale score	Proficient	Mean Scale score	Proficient
Grammar & Punctuation	Year 3	399	60%	429	66%
	Year 5	457	52%	472	60%
Numeracy	Year 3	397	80%	418	83%
	Year 5	483	69%	484	63%
Reading	Year 3	394	65%	420	76%
	Year 5	478	70%	484	68%
Spelling	Year 3	395	60%	413	66%
	Year 5	434	44%	439	46%
Writing	Year 3	427	85%	*	*
	Year 5	464	67%	475	68%

*A school's NAPLAN test must have a minimum of 11 participants and 80% participation rate. Data not reported for 2025 due to participation not meeting these criteria or no students were assessed. Participants include students who were assessed, including non-attempt, or those exempted from the test.

Student Wellbeing

Goals & Intended Outcomes

Completing the work on our Behaviour Support Process was a priority for our staff this year, with staff meetings and PLTs used to workshop and refine the content. Our Insight SRC data was also used to drive what we would like in our Annual Action Plan, and to set goals that would improve staff and student outcomes.

Achievements

Respect, Resilience and Responsibility became a focus for all staff and students as we worked to refine our Behaviour Support Process further. These three fundamental values were linked with our original school values in our BSP to underpin our expected behaviours at school. All classes focused on a particular value each term and the school leaders spoke about these at assemblies. The Restorative Practice approach was embedded and students became very familiar with the steps and processes involved.

Throughout the year as different situations arose, we found that there were parts of the BSP that we wanted to change or tweak and so the document became quite fluid for a time. By the end of 2025, it was ready to release to the parent community as a complete document. We decided to hold this back and release it at the beginning of 2026 to start the year with the BSP underpinning our practices.

The James Anderson "Learnership" program urged students to take ownership of their learning by thinking about what kind of learner they are and whether they were sitting in their comfort zone.

We continued to hold SSG meetings and work together with families of students with Individual Learning Plans to set goals and ensure that those students are receiving what they need to reach their full potential.

Value Added

- Continuation of the Mental Health in Primary Schools program
- Continuation of the Inform and Empower program
- Indi the Wellbeing Dog continues to be part of the school week
- Respectful Relationships continued in all classrooms
- Continuation of the Smiling Mind program
- R U OK? Day acknowledged
- Wellbeing Checks for staff completed
- School camps completed

- Individual Learning Plans for all students with needs
- SSG meetings termly for families
- Attendance at Learning Diversity days and PD for our Learning Diversity/Wellbeing Leader
- So Well (Social and Wellbeing) Team continued to plan and organise activities to boost staff morale on a termly basis
- Our Behaviour Support Process was refined and made ready for introduction to the school community in 2026.

Student Satisfaction

Our Student Wellbeing Aggregate improved in 2025 from 67.2 to 73.7 which was pleasing, indicating a shift in how the students are feeling in terms of their relationships with their teachers and their engagement in their learning. Although we have only just begun our journey into Learnership, being able to recognise the kind of learner they are may have contributed to this student engagement.

All components in the Years 5 & 6 student's socio-emotional experience improved in 2025, along with a substantial jump in the opinion of classroom behaviour from 22 to 77. The implementation of restorative conversations coincides with this improvement and could be attributed to the students awareness of how behaviour is dealt with and the processes that take place when an incident occurs. The Student Behaviour Aggregate also reflects this with an increase from 55 to 73.3.

Student Attendance

Non-attendance procedures remain consistent in the school, with absences monitored through the SIMON system. After the daily roll mark, absences without reason are followed up with an SMS message at 10am each day by our office manager and a response (or lack of) recorded on SIMON.

Absence of three or more days without reason or without contact of any nature by parents, requires follow up by the principal with families through a phone call. Lack of action for non-attendance by parents is recorded and, where necessary, external support is engaged to initiate action, such as the Wellbeing team from CEB or services who may be able to provide support to the family, depending on circumstances.

Attendance is commented on in student reports by the principal when attendance is of concern. The introduction to staff of the Intellischools platform will assist us with tracking attendance data in the future, but its use for us is in its early stages.

Average Student Attendance Rate by Year Level	
Y01	91.55
Y02	94
Y03	91.85
Y04	91.61
Y05	90.36
Y06	90.95
Overall average attendance	91.72

Leadership

Goals & Intended Outcomes

While there was no specific Leadership Goal in our Annual Action Plan, my personal goal was to distribute leadership more amongst the members of the Leadership Team. This would be done by taking small steps, starting with allowing each team member to take on and lead different elements of our school learning.

Achievements

The "Student Agency - Schools That Listen" initiative (part of the DOBCEL Strategy) allowed for the assistant principal to take on this project and lead it into 2026. He also looked further into the Intellischools platform and committed to bringing this to the staff, starting with a staff meeting/video conference with the creators of Intelischools to introduce staff to its features and benefits.

The Learning and Teaching Leader continued to find her way in her new position and with support from the previous leader, was able to navigate her way through the year and lead us in our final year of Structured Literacy.

We committed to working with James Anderson with a view to improving our student engagement, with shared language and concepts to assist students to understand how they learn best.

Expenditure And Teacher Participation in Professional Learning	
List Professional Learning undertaken in 2025	
• James Anderson - Learnership PL and follow-up staff meetings x 4 • Workshops for Religious Education Leader, Learning and Teaching Leader (including Flare/Structured Literacy PD) and Learning Diversity. • First Aid full course • Fullness of Life PD (RE) • Structured Literacy PD (school closures) and staff meetings • Workshops x 6 on the redesign of the School Improvement Process (Principal).	
Number of teachers who participated in PL in 2025	12
Average expenditure per teacher for PL	\$1282.00

Teacher Satisfaction

Teacher satisfaction has remained reasonably steady according to the Insight data. Declines in Individual Distress (experiencing negative emotions at school) could point to the often overwhelming workload and excessive documentation currently required to meet compliance (SALT modules, NCCD requirements, etc). The Organisational Climate has dropped slightly from 76.1 to 74.2, along with the teaching Climate Aggregate (78.4 to 77.4). Despite this, the school remains focused on improvement and teachers are clear about the expectations of their roles.

Teacher Qualifications	
Doctorate	0
Masters	1
Graduate	2
Graduate Certificate	2
Bachelor Degree	10
Advanced Diploma	1
No Qualifications Listed	0

Staff Composition	
Principal Class (Headcount)	2
Teaching Staff (Headcount)	11
Teaching Staff (FTE)	8.99
Non-Teaching Staff (Headcount)	14
Non-Teaching Staff (FTE)	9.52
Indigenous Teaching Staff (Headcount)	0

Community Engagement

Goals & Intended Outcomes

With a focus on building and fostering collaborative partnerships with parents and the wider community through embedding effective communication strategies and engagement opportunities, we continued to make reasonable gains.

By actively seeking feedback through parent surveys and taking on board suggestions by parents of ways to improve various events or communication, we feel that communication between the school and parent community is successful the majority of the time.

Achievements

The school has continued to use various methods of communication to ensure that our families can access the school information they need. Teachers remain available via email (with boundaries around when emails will be answered) and also through the Seesaw app, which families enjoy and use frequently to share information about their child. Family/school interaction is encouraged regularly in the newsletter, particularly when families are experiencing hardship or have particular issues they would like followed up. The newsletter is also used to communicate important dates, upcoming events and classroom news. At times, survey links seeking feedback on particular activities are placed in the newsletter, as well as links to relevant information about curriculum or wellbeing. The School TV platform continues to be used in the newsletter, although less frequently than in the previous year.

We continued to use the Enquiry Tracker platform as our enrolment procedure, with enrolments followed up with a personal meeting between principal and families. New Prep parents are welcomed at a BBQ evening where families have an opportunity to get to know each other and a short information session is offered on what to expect when your child comes to school. Our website offers a multitude of information about the school, policies and procedures and curriculum. In 2026, we hope to redo our website to make improvements and to make sure it is offering relevant information to the community and prospective families.

Once again, our Family Night was held to bring the community together in an informal setting. The students' learning from the STOMP Dance Program was showcased with a short performance, the Lion's Club provided a BBQ, and this was followed by a wander through classrooms to see examples of the learning that has been taking place so far.

The school choir performed at the local Aged Care facility, spent time chatting and getting to know the residents, and performed Christmas Carols for them at the end of the year. The local parish continued to be welcomed at our school events, with parishioners joining us at celebrations such as Mother's Day and Grandparents' Day, stepping in to work with students

whose mums or grandparents were unable to attend. A successful Bingo Night was also run by the Student Advisory Council, with many families and the wider community attending. Our end-of-year concert drew one of our largest crowds ever, with extended families joining us to celebrate the year and watch the students perform.

Grade Five and Six students took part in the Police in Schools program with Joe Clarke, who led the students through topics such as cyber bullying and personal safety.

Parent Satisfaction

The Community Engagement Aggregate in our Insight survey has increased from 86.2 to 89.3, indicating that parents feel that they feel involved or have input into their child's education and this is in turn supported by the scores in the Parent opinion percentiles, which have remained consistently high since the 2023 survey.

With feedback on events and processes throughout the year positive, and high attendance at community events such as our Family Night, sporting events and our end-of-year concert, it is obvious that parents are happy overall with how the school is inviting their participation and inclusion.

Financial Performance

The school's financial performance information and a report of the financial activities of the school's boarding premises (if applicable) have been provided to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) and will be available for the community to access from their website at www.acnc.gov.au.

For more detailed information regarding our school please visit our website at www.olshmerbein.catholic.edu.au