



2024

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 2024 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 14 May 2025

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

Reflecting on 2024, we have much to be proud of, with DOBCEL demonstrating our dedication to ensuring the highest quality student outcomes in a safe, affordable, faith-based and nurturing environment. There was significant ongoing investment in new learning facilities and refurbishments through the Australian and state Government Capital Grants Program and school community funding continued across our schools, enhancing learning spaces and amenities for the benefit of students and staff.

In 2024, I visited all our Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL) schools from the Murray to the Sea. DOBCEL governs 51 primary schools, one F-8 school, and five secondary colleges, educating approximately 13,500 students and employing over 2,200 teachers and staff across the diocese. These visits highlighted the spirit of harmony and sense of community, along with the cultures of care for students and staff.

During 2024, I had the privilege of meeting with all Principals along with leadership colleagues and staff. Demands on schools continue to grow, as the communities they service undergo change and face challenges such as devastating bushfires and cost of living challenges.

During the year DOBCEL commenced the development of its future DOBCEL Strategy 2035. Our strategy is focused on ensuring fullness of life for all in our school communities and particularly our students. With our Catholic Identity foundational to our mission our focus will be on

- Collaborative Cultures
- Engagement & Belonging
- School as Community
- Rich Pedagogical practices for deeper learning and wellbeing
- Sustainable Stewardship

I recognise the extraordinary work, exceptional dedication and professionalism of staff in our schools and offices in providing education services to the families and communities they serve. I particularly acknowledge the commitment of our school leadership teams and their staff in nurturing and empowering the students in our care, as together we work to bring to life our vision: As partners in Catholic Education and open to God's presence, we pursue the fullness of life for all.

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 and is based on the gospel values of: love, trust, dignity, respect, freedom, forgiveness, self-awareness and self-discipline.

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 the 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 154 students enrolled at OLSH are Catholic, with the majority of other families not in faith.

Despite this, 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 recognizing 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

Another year has flown by at OLSH, and in terms of things going along smoothly, 2024 has delivered! With an enrolment of 152 students at the beginning of the year, the classrooms settled quickly into routine and some solid learning. We welcomed a Prep class of 22 students, who soon became part of the school under the guidance of Miss Appledore and their very attentive buddies! We had only one addition to our staff numbers this year, as Mrs. Tanya Pascale joined us as a Learning Support Officer, making the return to school a familiar one for all students.

As the year progressed, we once again immersed ourselves in the celebrations and events that shape our Catholic identity – masses, liturgies, Catholic Education Week, and the acknowledgement of 150 years of our Ballarat Diocese. Students continued to widen the scope of their learning and question the world around them through the teaching of the Awakenings program and took part in many activities which reinforce the gospel values that our school's mission is based upon. With our Catholic numbers remaining around the 30% mark, the actions of our students and their generosity through fundraising at Easter, Christmas, in Mission Week and for initiatives such as Homelessness Week show that they are living out our Graduate Statement by bring their faith to life. For me, the offer to take part in a spiritual pilgrimage to Ireland in the middle of the year was a fantastic opportunity to focus on our school's Mercy beginnings and to spend time with fellow principals from across the diocese.

Learning across the school through the Structured Literacy approach continued in 2024, with our students completing the second year of the program. While staff attended professional development and continuous learning during the year at staff meetings, student data has shown that the Structured Literacy program is making an impact on learning in literacy. We have continued to track our improvements in other curriculum areas through formal and informal assessment and are very pleased with the growth we are seeing. Professional development in Structured Literacy will continue next year as we delve deeper into the program.

Student wellbeing has once again been at the forefront of all that we do at OLSH, closely monitored by our wonderful Wellbeing and Diversity Leader, Jo Finlayson, and bolstered by the dedication and good practices of our staff and their knowledge of the students they teach. Students have continued to thrive through access to additional learning opportunities provided to address their specific needs and we have worked closely with families to ensure that their children's learning journey is one we are taking together.

This year we have made some changes to our school grounds, with a much-needed update of our basketball court surface being carried out, and the replacement of our junior playground with a more compliant structure, finished off with new rubber underneath. While

these refurbishments were expensive, we hope they will stand the test of time and service the students' needs for the 20 plus years that the old playground did! I think it is fair to say that the playground has been a big hit so far! Our school grounds continue to attract compliments from visitors and new families, and we thank Grant Finlayson, Phil Cupper and Ron Fitzpatrick for their work in keeping the school looking amazing.

As part of our School Improvement Plan, our focus on community has been maintained through our attendance at local events, such as the Anzac and Remembrance Day services and our connection to Chaffey Aged Care, where our choir has sung on two occasions this year. Our students in Grades 3 and 4 are also in the process of working with the Merbein Development Association, helping to beautify the planter pots in the main street of Merbein, which has been a task they have thoroughly enjoyed. We hope to continue our community focus in the coming year. Within our own school community, we have celebrated with events like the Family Night, the End of Year Concert and the Bingo Night, which was well-attended once again by the parent community. Many thanks must go to our School Advisory Council and staff for their efforts in getting this evening organised. It was a fun night for all!

Our 2024 OLSH School Leaders made their mark early, taking on the task of leading assembly each week and growing in confidence as the year progressed. Assisted by Mr. Lawrence and Mrs. Lohmeyer, all student leaders did a great job of representing the school and their fellow students throughout the year at various events and celebrations and should be very proud of what they have achieved and how they have grown as leaders. In 2025, we aim to delve deeper into the idea of Student Voice and not only what this looks like, but also the positive impact it could have for our students and their engagement in their learning.

In 2025, we hope to develop our Master Plan further, with plans to refurbish the Administration area and staffroom, add workspaces for staff and more rooms for the purpose of meeting with families and visitors. Plans are currently underway with Energy Architecture and a consultation process with staff and SAC members will take place as plans progress. With satisfactory learning and play spaces available for our students, it will be exciting to focus on other areas of the school in the next 5 years.

As we look to the future, our focus will be on maintaining satisfactory numbers while keeping a small-school feel. With our student enrolments falling slightly to just under 150 to begin the new year, our focus will remain on attracting new families to the school to ensure that numbers remain steady. Next year, after several years of composite classes, we have decided to make the move back to straight grades, with class sizes ranging from 16 to 26.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have contributed to a great year. We are fortunate to have a great group of parents on our School Advisory Council who have committed to meeting throughout the year to listen and learn about what happens around our school and who continually offer advice and support to me. Although our SAC is only advisory in its capacity, their contribution is appreciated greatly and provides an invaluable connection between school and families. We acknowledge the contribution especially of Amy Cupper,

who is stepping away from the SAC at the end of this year. We thank her for her commitment to our school and the time she has given over the past 2 years.

As always, I wish to thank the staff of OLSH, who continue to go above and beyond for their students every day, and although much of their work is unseen, their impact is evident on the happy faces of our students and in their learning and development. I cannot praise enough the effort and dedication from all teachers and Learning Support Officers who care for their students as they would their own children, guiding and encouraging them every day. We should be grateful every day for their commitment to our school. We thank Mrs. Tana Lawrence for her contribution and dedication in her role as the replacement for Danielle Ford, who went on maternity leave in Term 2 and hope she has enjoyed her time with us.

Many thanks go to Adam Lawrence and Rebecca Appledore who have assisted and supported me this year as Deputy Principal and on Leadership – their support and has been invaluable and immense. I cannot thank Bec enough for her contribution to this area. Rebecca will step aside in 2025 and a new group of leaders, including Adam, will be formed who will no doubt contribute just as valuably. Recognition and thanks must also go to Mia Mottram, who has taken on an increased workload and has done a wonderful job in the office in the absence of Carolyn Clementson, who we hope to see back at OLSH soon. With Judy Norton stepping in to take on some of Carolyn's tasks, the office has continued to operate as smoothly as always.

Inevitably, each new school year brings change and at the end of this year we say farewell to Carol Marks, who has been a part of our OLSH family for more than 14 years. Carol's work as an LSO, assisting in the office, in her sustainability role and especially as a friend and colleague to all of us will always be appreciated and she will be greatly missed by us all. We wish her well as she moves away to South Australia.

With 24 Grade 6 students moving on at the end of the year, and 16 new Prep students beginning their education journey, we look forward to 2025 and all that it will bring!

Catholic Identity and Mission

Goals & Intended Outcomes

Our Annual Action Plan goal to integrate Indigenous perspectives as part of our contemporary Catholic identity continued to be a focus in 2024.

Achievements

Our hope in 2024 was that we would make more explicit links to Indigenous perspectives in our RE planners, and all classrooms have incorporated some material of this kind during their units of work this year, particularly in units with a focus on Stewardship of Creation.

Individual classroom teachers continued to work with Kim Hawkes on how to plan and implement rich and effective units of work and Kim also led us in some work on how to use prayer in the classroom, which teachers found very helpful.

As always, OLSH held many masses and liturgies which were well-attended by the community, including the parish, which 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.

Value Added

- Celebration of Catholic Education Week with all Sunraysia Catholic schools
- PD 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

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 2nd year of the program.

During the year, our focus was on the Writing element of Structured Literacy and continuing to refine our practices in the elements already taught.

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. 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 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. As we use Stepping Stones as our Mathematics program, it was great to see that this had been adjusted to reflect the incoming changes.

Student Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes in NAPLAN assessments improved in 2024, with a comparison of previous results highlighting improvements in all areas of the assessment, particularly for Grade . The results in Spelling for Grade show that we have moved above like schools in achievement, while in Writing the results show great improvement, with OLSH well above like schools in Grade 3 and above like schools in Grade 5. This indicates to us that our use of The Writing Revolution and our Structured Literacy program are working well.

Numeracy data for Grade 5 has remained steady with scores slightly above like schools, and in Grade 3 great improvement is showing with results well above like schools. We continue to use the Stepping Stones Program with rigour.

Our Tier 2 Literacy interventions (small group) have been based on DIBELS testing and have shown to improve student outcomes.

NAPLAN - Proportion of students meeting the proficient standards			
Domain	Year level	Mean Scale score	Proficient
Grammar & Punctuation	Year 3	459	71%
	Year 5	486	67%
Numeracy	Year 3	438	86%
	Year 5	485	56%
Reading	Year 3	445	86%
	Year 5	490	65%
Spelling	Year 3	431	71%
	Year 5	444	47%
Writing	Year 3	*	*
	Year 5	485	69%

*A school's NAPLAN test must have a minimum of 11 participants and 80% participation rate. Data not reported for 2024 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

One of our SIF Goals was to strengthen collaborative partnerships with the school and wider community through authentic opportunities for improving student outcomes.

A major part of achieving this goal linked with our ReLATE journey, which saw us delving into the third year of the program and examining more closely concept of the Window of Tolerance and Self-regulation Plans for staff.

Achievements

Through our work with Kristy Elliott, we focused on how we can better regulate ourselves before assisting the students to do the same. This involved developing our own self-regulation plans and actively using these in classrooms to model to students how simple this could be.

Continuing to use a shared language across the school in relation to wellbeing was an important focus and this led us toward re-evaluating our Behaviour Management Procedure, which has evolved into a Behaviour Support Process. This framework was created by all staff and was based on the implementation of the Restorative Practice approach, and Kristy guided us through how this might look. We worked on using appropriate questions to allow students to take ownership of conflict resolution and in staff groups, focused on establishing how we would communicate this change to our families. By the end of 2024, we had developed a solid basis for the Behaviour Support document and had revised our school values to focus on three main concepts of Respect, Resilience and Responsibility.

As part of the Mental Health in Primary Schools initiative, our Wellbeing Leader and principal attended the two training days, and we have continued to revise and strengthen our current practices in this area.

Value Added

- Year 3 (final year) of the ReLATE program completed
- Mental Health in Primary Schools training
- Indi the Wellbeing Dog continues to be part of the school week
- Respectful Relationships continued in all classrooms

- Continuation of the Smiling Mind program
- RU OK Day
- Wellbeing Checks for staff
- School camps completed
- Individual Learning Plans for all students with needs
- SSG meetings termly for families
- Attendance at Learning Diversity days and PD
- So Well (Social and Wellbeing) Team continued to plan and organise activities to boost staff moral
- Restorative Practice PD with Kristy Elliott

Student Satisfaction

Our Insight SRC data from 2023 year indicated some interesting changes in our student data,

including to the way the students feel safe in the classroom and in terms of engagement. Since our last Insight survey, the current Student Behaviour Aggregate has dropped from 78.2 to 55.0. While this was concerning, this cohort of students had quite a few upheavals in their schooling, including Covid, which has seen more students disengage from the curriculum and school in general. Engagement in Learning scores had declined since our last survey, which is of concern but again ties in with what we know about our students and attitudes to school - this gives us plenty to evaluate and think about when planning for the future. Our plan to work with James Anderson in 2025 on Learnership will hopefully address some of our student attitudes towards school and their learning and as a result, change our data in the next round of Insight surveys next year.

Interestingly, we feel that our Grade 3 and 4 scores in this area would probably have been quite different from those of the participating cohort, highlighting to us that we should include them in the survey, which we have not done previously.

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.

Average Student Attendance Rate by Year Level	
Y01	91.6
Y02	94.0
Y03	91.9
Y04	91.6
Y05	90.4
Y06	91.0
Overall average attendance	91.7

Leadership

Goals & Intended Outcomes

There were no intended goals in this area in our 2024 Annual Action Plan, but as always school leadership was focused on improvement and whole school development for the year ahead and into the future. The development of leadership amongst staff remained a priority, with professional development offered across several areas and the chance for individual staff to step up into leadership positions.

The Leadership Team has continued to take on different tasks and roles in relation to general organisation and timetables, with the bulk of our time spent reworking the intricacies of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

Achievements

With a better understanding of how to use the tools made available to us in relation to the EBA and its requirements, the Leadership Team were able to make some changes to our timetables that benefited the school as well as individual staff. Professional Development offered by CEB was excellent in supporting our understandings.

Spreading the load of leadership tasks has been quite onerous as people learn their roles, but very successful, despite having a reduced team due to the illness of one member. A decision was made to review this for 2025 to possibly include more team members and to gain a broader range of perspectives and the team for 2025 will include teaching staff, the Wellbeing Leader, staff who lead POLs and the principal.

Expenditure And Teacher Participation in Professional Learning	
List Professional Learning undertaken in 2024	
In 2024, we continued to attend PD individually and as a whole staff. Professional Learning attended included ReLATE Year 3, Year 2 of the Structured Literacy program, Religious Education, First Aid updates and Diocesan Leadership Gatherings (which included various topics of Professional Learning). We also completed PD and workshops with Kristy Elliott, with a focus on Restorative Practice and reworking our Behaviour Support Procedure. POL leaders attended PD relevant to their areas of Religious Education and Learning and Teaching. Wellbeing/Learning Diversity Leader attended various workshops for the Mental Health in Primary Schools initiative, as well as professional learning days for NCCD.	
Number of teachers who participated in PL in 2024	12
Average expenditure per teacher for PL	\$1135.00

Teacher Satisfaction

2023 Insight data showed that teachers are happy in the workplace, and are particularly comfortable working collaboratively. Although slightly lower than past surveys, individual morale is at a good level (72) as is school morale(78). Teachers feel supported by leadership (84) and role clarity is high (80) even though the demands of work are making an impact - after discussions, teachers say this relates directly to the amount of note taking linked to compliance and the ever-increasing number of students with Individual Learning Plans.

Our next Insight SRC survey will be carried out in 2025.

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)	12
Teaching Staff (FTE)	10.2
Non-Teaching Staff (Headcount)	14
Non-Teaching Staff (FTE)	9.8
Indigenous Teaching Staff (Headcount)	0

Community Engagement

Goals & Intended Outcomes

Our goal in the School Improvement Plan is to strengthen collaborative partnerships within the school and wider community through authentic opportunities for improving student outcomes.

This was broken down to the goal in our Annual Action Plan of building and fostering partnerships with parents and the wider community by embedding effective communication strategies and engagement opportunities.

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 was introduced through the newsletter to offer information to families on varying topics relevant to the development of children.

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.

Our second successful Family Night was held to bring the community together in an informal setting. The student's learning from the STOMP Dance Program was showcased with a short performance, families enjoyed a BBQ tea cooked by the Lions Club, 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 and spent time chatting and getting to know the residents. They also planned a performance at the local Christmas Carols, but unfortunately this was cancelled due to poor weather. The local parish continued to be

welcome at our school events, with parishioners joining us at celebrations such as Mother's Day and the end of year Graduation, and the school offered our Multipurpose Room to the parish for a parish gathering during the year.

Parent Satisfaction

As supported by our 2023 Insight SRC data, the parents and families are extremely happy with how the school and teachers are supporting their children. Parents see staff morale as very high (89) and feel that the partnership between school and parent is strong (97). In the classroom, parents feel that behaviour management is strong (89) and the learning being provided is exceptional (92). Overall, parent data strongly suggests that community engagement is strong (86.2 on the Community Engagement Aggregate), the school is supportive and communication is clear.

Our next Insight SRC survey will be conducted in 2025.

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