

## Definition of Pastoral Care

In defining pastoral care we have chosen to use the definition developed by Kevin Treston, a prominent writer in the field:

*Pastoral Care is the integration of the academic, social and religious dimensions of a school's energy so that an atmosphere of care prevails within the school community. Each person of the school community – administrators, parents, students, teachers and cleaners is invited to become more fully human.*

*Pastoral care is developing empathetic relationships so that the people in the school community are nurtured into wholesome maturity.*

*Pastoral care is an expression of the philosophy and vision of the school.* (Pastoral Care for Schools p5)

## Theology of Pastoral Care

Pastoral care in a Catholic School is based upon the conviction that we are loved by God and that we are called to love one another – “*Love one another as I have loved you*” (John 15:12). Jesus, in his relationship with God and the people he met in his ministry, gives us the inspiration and energy to establish a school community in which all members may feel loved and empowered to realise their potential – “*I have come that you may have life and have it to the fullest*” (John 10:10).

Jesus, as he is portrayed in the Gospels, exemplifies many images of pastoral care such as liberator, healer, reconciler, and compassionate person, teacher of wisdom and most especially as good shepherd. It is this image which provides the name “pastoral care”.

Several main themes of pastoral care can be drawn from the image of the good shepherd as described to us in the New Testament. Pastoral care is about non-competitive relationships between people who are valued for themselves rather than just for what they are able to produce. As a result it is empowering and transforming for all. Pastoral care is compassionate and merciful especially towards those in difficulty. It involves imagination and risk-taking to leave the ninety-nine and search for the one who has strayed. Pastoral care assumes hope for the future and involves constant reflection and evaluation.

## Pastoral Care of Children

The teaching of social and co-operative skills will be an integral part of the curriculum delivery at St Brigid's School. There will also be an emphasis on the teaching of these skills through opportunities provided in the playground, at sports and other activities outside the classroom.

Good systems of playground supervision will be maintained. We believe well monitored playgrounds are an essential element of the pastoral care of students. As outlined in the St Brigid's School Code of Conduct, behaviour issues will be addressed in a way that is not demeaning to any individual. Opportunities will be provided for all parties to be heard, just and fair processes will be followed before consequences, which consider the needs of all those affected and are appropriate to the situation, are carried out. The outcome of consequences will be towards generating renewal and respect and be up building of relationships by way of values and reconciliation and justice.

We are committed to providing a wide range of recreational activities for children at play and lunch times.

We believe that the availability of teachers for informal contact with children is important in creating an atmosphere for continuous pastoral care. We believe that teachers being in their classrooms from 8.30am are an important element of this availability, as is the quick chat during playground duty or in passing in the corridor. Teachers will seek to show a genuine and friendly interest in children's lives.

Children should be given regular opportunities to confidentially report on such pastoral care matters such as bullying, harassment and other concerns.

The staff will continue to monitor individual students with pastoral care concerns on a regular basis and communicate this to other staff members at weekly briefing meetings.

St Brigid's School has a well-developed system for checking on the attendance of children. We see this as an essential element of Pastoral Care and we are committed to maintaining this service.

Children transferring from other schools can be vulnerable to isolation and bullying. Staff will closely monitor these children and will seek to communicate closely with the children's parents/caregivers.

A variety of avenues will be used to show affirmation to children for such things as achievement, keen and enthusiastic participation and kindness as shown to others. These will include assemblies, newsletters, during class and formal and informal discussions with parents.

High quality curriculum programmes will be planned and delivered to all children using a variety of effective learning and teaching strategies. Where appropriate, children will be placed on special needs or special abilities programmes.

A variety of sporting and cultural activities will provide children with opportunities to learn about team work, develop skills, have fun and work hard. This will also allow for positive interactions between children and staff and children and children.

## Pastoral Care of Families

All types of family structures are valued at St Brigid's School. The school in its communications and curriculum delivery will be sensitive to the many types of family structures our children come from.

All staff are committed to ensuring the school is a warm and welcoming place for parents. It is recognised that when parents and teachers work closely together then the pastoral care of children is greatly enhanced.

The school is often the first agency a family will approach in times of stress. In such circumstances the most effective role for the school may be to direct the family to the appropriate support agency. It is therefore important that the school maintains close relationships with family support agencies.

St Brigid's School has a history of high levels of family involvement in the school. The school is committed to maintaining and further developing this involvement through social gatherings, parent support groups, parent information sessions, family ministry team.

The school will continue to maintain a sensitive approach to collection of money for school activities. This will include publishing regularly that the Principal is available to discuss any financial concerns parents may have with relation to school finances.

St Brigid's School expects all members of the school community to treat one another with respect.

## Pastoral Care of Staff

Staff are both recipients and administrators of pastoral care.

Pastoral care programmes at St Brigid's School will include all teaching and support staff.

Leadership styles that affirm and challenge with dignity and collaboration in decision making will be essential components of the pastoral care programme.

St Brigid's School Board of Trustees is committed to being a good employer by:

- Being mindful of the health and safety of staff
- Having realistic expectations regarding demands on staff members' time
- Treating staff members with equity
- Ensuring good avenues of communication
- Maintaining a good physical environment for staff
- Ensuring an effective performance management system is in place
- Having provision in the annual budget for sound professional development.

It is recognised that all staff require affirmation for the work they do at St Brigid's School.

Problems and communication difficulties involving staff need to be dealt with in a prompt and responsible manner.

It is recognised that staff relations are strengthened by sound communications, industrial harmony and a genuine interest in each other.

Time will be set aside each week for staff prayer as this is seen as an important way for teachers to renew and strengthen their hopes and dreams for their chosen vocation.

The importance of setting time aside to have fun times together is essential for creating healthy and supportive staff relations.

## Pastoral Care of the Parish Communities

Regular opportunities will be provided for involvement with the wider Parish communities such as combined parish / school Sunday Masses, invitations to school events extended in Parish bulletins, strong relationships with the Parish Councils.

The special role of our Parish Priests and the Brigidine Sisters is recognised as an essential component of the Pastoral Care Programme. Their presence around the school, both in a formal capacity and their informal role of being about the place, is an important and powerful one.

