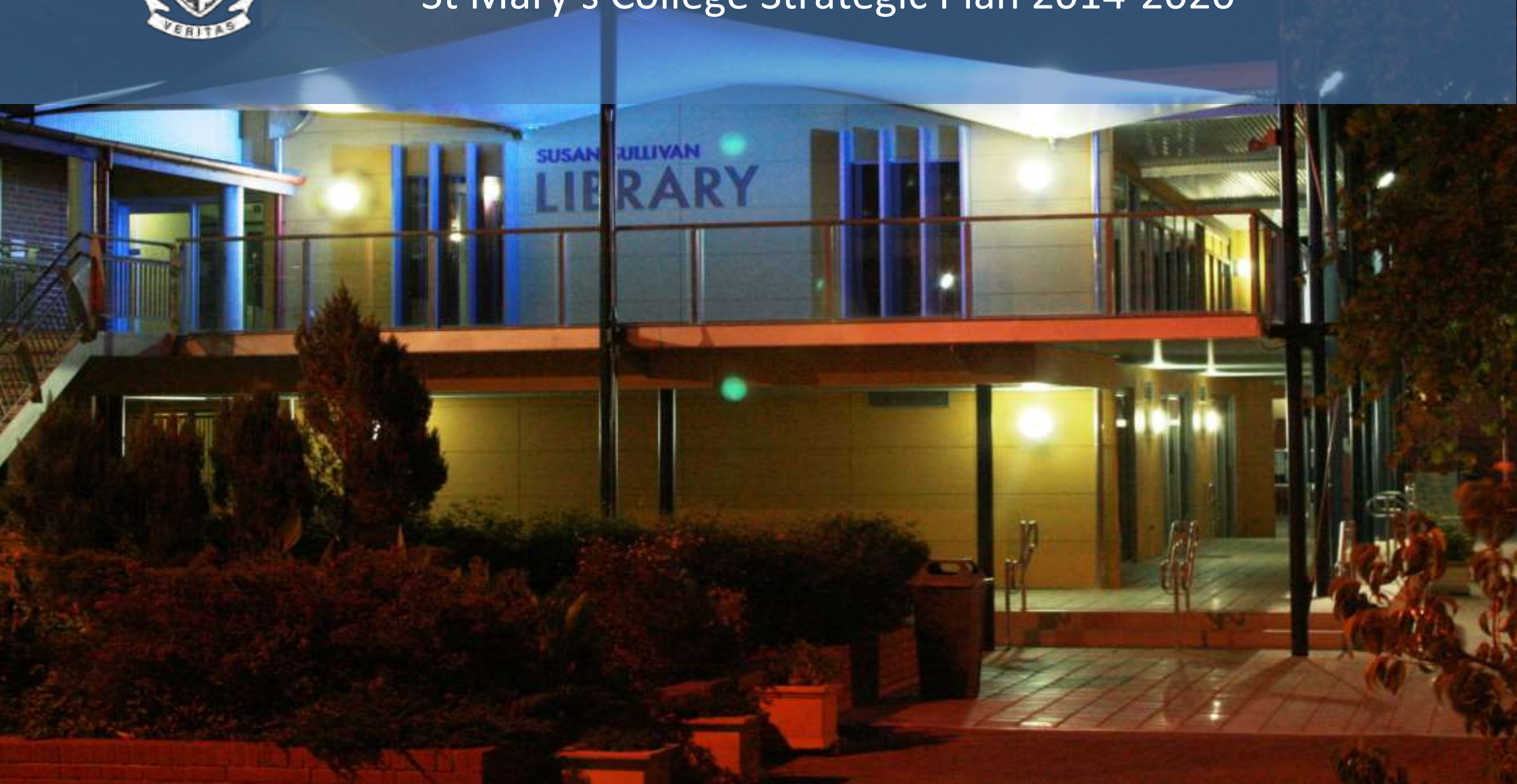




ON THE EDGE OF INNOVATION

St Mary's College Strategic Plan 2014-2020



ON THE EDGE OF INNOVATION

As Dominican educators we are called to ask significant questions as we read the 'signs of our time' so continuing the endless search for truth.

It is my pleasure to introduce the St Mary's College Strategic Plan for 2014 – 2020.

I wish to thank the College community, past and present who shaped this plan by their contribution to this dynamic process. We are excited by the vision that has formed and aspire to a future that will enable our young women as graduates to continue their journey. They will do so inspired by a sense of justice, an eagerness to pursue truth and a desire to recognise the face of God in all human beings and in all creation.

St Mary's College is the longest continuously operating school for girls in Adelaide. Still on its original site St. Marys from the very beginning contributed to the future of young South Australian women and as its Principal it is a privilege to acknowledge this role.

While shaping our future we respect our past by being faithful to our heritage but acknowledging the challenges a rapidly changing world presents.

St Mary's College is confident about its future. We draw strength from our founding Dominican values and pioneer sisters as we fulfil our future destiny. As educators of young women we will face the challenges with imagination, and invite our students and community to be courageous in bringing this strategic plan to life.

Eileen Young
Principal
December 2013

St Mary's College

STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2020 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A vision for the future

St Mary's College is a Reception to Year Twelve College located in the city square mile of Adelaide, South Australia. The College serves a community of girls and young women and aims to provide an environment that is vibrant, welcoming and safe, that celebrates diversity and encourages excellence in learning. The St. Mary's community works together to provide an educational experience that develops the individual, challenges each girl to continue their search for integrity and to make a lifelong commitment to the pursuit of truth.

The Curriculum aims to support and challenge individual learning. It encourages girls to engage in a wide range of co-curricular activities with a special commitment to the Performing Arts, Sport, Social Justice and Ecological Sustainability. Its primary goal is to address the educational needs of young women. In doing that it provides counselling, career and vocational support to help each girl discover and develop individual goals. It also provides social education, pastoral care and behaviour education programs acknowledging development stages and needs. St Mary's focusses on diverse leadership goals for girls.

A rich history of youthful innovation and courage for achievement and enterprise

An enduring Charism founded in the work of St Dominic and a deep faith were the cornerstones for the strong foundations that were set in the early years of St Mary's College.

When the small band of young Dominican Sisters set out for the small settlement of Adelaide in one of the world's most remote and unknown colonies, they did so with great heart, high expectations and with a clear mission to establish an educational institution based on excellence, high performance and a superior education. Their goal was to provide learning intended to guide young girls into women of independence, intelligence and presence in personal, family and community life.

This goal unashamedly focussed on those girls and young women who would participate further than the limited elementary education offered to students in most families. The intended student population was clearly drawn from those families who engaged in business, law, government and other social enterprises responsible for the civic architecture of the emerging state.

The pioneer sisters were young, adventurous missionaries charged with a strong spirit of progress and who did achieve their aspirations. This achievement was not without its privations, struggles and personal costs. The College history recalls early stories of the journey and the collaborations required to build and expand the College. Those stories depict assertive, independent and compassionate leadership within the sisters and the struggles of young women challenged with taking the lead in a confusing and chaotic world.

What resulted was a College with a strong place in the educational landscape of Adelaide; and possibly the first school that served an ecumenical student population whose aspirations were to higher learning at school and beyond.

As well, there was a special commitment to providing a primary level service to the children of the poor and other specialist services for deaf and disabled students. The result was an inclusive education that was challenging intellectually and pedagogically, demanding students engage in artistic and intellectual studies that challenged the prevailing attitudes to disability. This early work resulted in the later establishment of three specialist education services that are now known as St Anne's, St Patricks and the St Mary's Unit at Cabra College.

The Dominican ideals of searching for truth in everything, seeing the goodness in all of creation, encouraging the full potential of all and learning through a liberal and full curriculum prevailed and provided the cultural foundation for the College ethos. The religious focus was unequivocal, unobtrusive and foundational. Discipline focussed on the good and the positive in pupils and was based on firmness, kindness, tact and respect. St Mary's College aimed for a quality education for all students and the formation of each young woman to see "the good, the true and the beautiful" as well as be able to make "intelligent use of liberty."

This explicit message about relationships for learning and life in the College was matched with a specific emphasis on rigorous scholarship, high quality teaching and pedagogical training approaches aimed at producing excellent results for all students.

A reputation for talented and creative teaching and innovation in teaching and curriculum development also grew as did the culture of study and scholarship and the emphasis on the positive culture of classrooms and the respectful relationships with students.

Over the years the College changed shape, restructured its services and once the culture and mission were deeply embedded in the College, gradually saw the departure of the Dominican Sisters and their replacement by a lay teaching and support team. These changes were able to draw from a tradition of reflection on purpose, high aspiration and the courage for restructuring and contemporisation in order to lead girls and young women's education far beyond what was considered the standard of the day.

Building the future on the foundations of the past

That heritage is still part of the living culture of the College and provides the incentive to make St Mary's the College of choice for many South Australian girls and young women.

As in the formation years of the College, growing and learning in South Australia is still a changing and complex process, and as the Sisters struggled to develop a uniquely South Australian service for girls and young women, so do the leaders within the St Mary's Community now endeavour to form the College in the local, national and global context and ensure that its graduates step into a world for which they are prepared.

The paradox is that whilst the College is highly sought after as a school of choice for many of Adelaide's young Catholic, secular and interdenominational community and is highly regarded as one that delivers high quality teaching and achieves excellent results for all students, we know that the external influences on schooling are such that continuous reform and reshaping of the College will be an imperative for its ongoing growth and effectiveness. We also know that to enshrine the Dominican ideals and ethos into the College remains a critical feature of the leadership work within the school and that this work is essential in order to honour the founders' mission and enormous sacrifice in the interests of future generations of South Australian young women.

The forces influencing the re-thinking and reform in schooling are many. The formation of the College was done in a pioneering community where growth and innovation was fast and often without funds, expertise and qualified or trained staff. There were more wanting schools than those able to provide them. While the British brought a class system to our shores, the Irish brought the social justice movement. The schooling services that emerged from this era reflect that in both the independent, systemic and state education systems that work alongside each other today.

The period of rapid growth has now peaked. The education context of South Australia is now in a process of rationalising. The economic imperative to be distinctive and to grow as a robust and progressive College in a changing social and demographic climate is very real. The challenge for St Mary's College is to deliver a service with a distinctive point of difference and which builds on an established reputation for skilled relationships and quality results.

Achievements of the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan

Each dimension of the previous plan had a goal and several objectives that were specified with intentions and targets. A brief summary of the achievements of each domain is presented here in order to conclude that plan and use the outgrowth from it to develop the next.

Mission and Spirituality

During the time of the recently completed Strategic Plan, community members have acknowledged that their own spiritual journeys have been deeply nurtured and respected and considered fundamental to the Mission of this Dominican College. As St Mary's College moves forward into the future, it will continue to be a strong community of faith in the Dominican tradition.

The vibrant liturgical life of the College is reflective of the hopes of the early Dominican Sisters that St Mary's would offer a quality education founded in faith. It has encouraged authentic student engagement through the formation of the student liturgical group and specifically designed retreat programs have provided valid and relevant opportunities for Middle School and Senior School students to explore their personal faith journeys. Key Eucharistic celebrations, the use of the Chapel and the Veritas Lawns as sacred gathering spaces for liturgies as well as the Weekly Stillness Moments are constant and unashamed reminders of the rich spirituality of the College.

Staff members are provided with myriad opportunities to continually explore the Dominican tradition and parents and directors also have access to ongoing dialogue about the Dominican ethos to support their leadership responsibilities on the College Board and Council. Involvement of Leadership in the biennial Dominican Schools Conference, Dominican Eastern Network and Dominican Education Associates and development of Annual Dominican theme have all ensured that Dominican values are profoundly embedded in all dimensions of the College.

Consistent with the sense of inclusivity that the early Sisters displayed in establishing the school, St Mary's College today presents a significant community focus that both supports students' personal development based on Christian gospel values and encourages them to live out their faith as evidenced by a strong social justice culture that provides informal and formal opportunities for this. Explicit celebrations such as Harmony Week and Multi-cultural Day and Reconciliation Scholarships for Indigenous students are community expressions of the College's Mission and Spirituality.

From its beginnings, St Mary's has openly declared it was a Catholic school that embraced enrolment of students of all faiths. Through an extensive review and audit process, the development of a contemporary Religious Education curriculum and staff undertaking further RE qualifications, the College continues to successfully provide students with opportunities to encounter Catholic teachings that promote a deeper understanding, respect and awareness of all faiths and cultures and with a particular focus on Indigenous spirituality and feminist theolog.

The 140th Year of Celebrations in 2009 and the visit from Dominican Sisters from Cabra, Dublin and the strong relationship with and involvement of the Sisters of the Holy Cross Congregation have all served to re-ignite the mission and ethos of the College.

The clear commitment to offering a Catholic education and the faithfulness with which the College leadership has animated the Dominican story at the heart of its mission, will be a pivotal point from which the College can continue to shape its future direction and vision.

Community and Culture

In 2008, the College declared it would build a school community where students felt a strong sense of belonging, would be nurtured to recognize their individual worth and have the freedom to learn in ways that helped them as they reached their potential. This is only possible when the core values have explicit expression in all facets of community life. Development of improved review practices and information-sharing processes has seen a bold articulation of the core values of the College throughout the curriculum, the Care Education program, key policies and broader student learning experiences, all of which engenders a deeper sense of pride in the College community and for all that it has to offer.

All schools have learning as its core business but at St Mary's College, learning becomes a conduit for building a broader culture of learning throughout the entire College community. This has facilitated an acceptance by staff of the need for a strong professional review culture; recognition that more diverse programs enhance effective student leadership and support for parents involved in school governance all help build leadership capacity and strengthen both the wellbeing of the community and its educational vision.

Veritas – the search for truth – continues to be a hallmark of the College. Restorative Justice is a defining trait that contributes to the success of St Mary's as an inclusive community and is a significant vehicle for fostering strong relationships and effective learning. It is a model of practice that is recognized both nationally and internationally. As well, the growth of Social Justice structures, extensive student leadership, support of pilgrimages and the Service Learning are clear examples of a commitment to nurturing a culture of making a difference.

The various opportunities that have been implemented to celebrate and acknowledge the achievements and talents are testimony to the strength and health of the community and the value placed on the culture of learning that epitomizes St Mary's College. Alongside this, is the continued commitment to identify opportunities and strategies to preserve, share and celebrate the long and rich heritage of Dominican Education that must inform the future vision of the College.

Identification, effective communication, improved community links and innovative marketing strategies to promote the educational strengths, values and ethos of the College within the school community and to the wider community has ensured strong enrolment into the future.

Teaching and Learning

The staff had a number of courageous objectives that were aimed at relevance, expanded and accessible options for students, contemporary pedagogy that incorporates digital technologies, a broad and coherent curriculum, team and data driven programs, with students and their parents at the centre in relation to communication about success.

The focus on learning performance and the improvement of the programmes and services as a result of the continued use of data is now a priority in all colleges. Using data to inform teaching and challenge students towards individual and group goals is now much more possible and even more an imperative for all staff.

Technology is also such a dynamic area of change in the delivery of education services that this has increased in urgency and importance despite the efforts of staff to embrace those resources they are able to use. Their effort has produced awareness of the possibilities for teaching and learning and this has meant this is now a major focus that the staff has identified as priority work in the new plan.

So too is the work that is required to reframe girls and women's education in a contemporary context and prepare students as Independent and resilient young women who are able to take strong positions in their future life and maintain personal, social and economic strength and capability regardless of the life choices they make. The politics of girls' education may need to be stirred into a discussion that raises awareness of the importance of single sex education for girls and women.

The focus on independent learners and building thinking and learning skills is a high priority articulated by staff and parents. These goals are resonant of the goals the Dominican founders had and it was heartening to see the mission so closely held still despite all the competing forces pushing education and schools in so many directions. It is clear that mission remains in strong hands and is passed on actively and respectfully through the generations of students and teachers in the College.

Considerable formal curriculum reform and development has been undertaken in this phase of the College development and now that the SACE has been embedded and the focus on evidence based teaching is evolving into staff review of teaching efficacy and productivity, there is a strong internal push for more emphasis to be placed on pedagogical reform and collaboration within teams for consistent and effective teaching.

Resources and Campus Development

Just as the pioneer Sisters understood how important it was to identify, prioritize and provide appropriate facilities to support the aspirations of their educational vision, the last five years of the College has reflected the same commitment and ensured the learning needs of the students were supported by relevant, contemporary and future – focused resources and campus.

While the College Master Plan was positively interrupted by the BER, most of the extensive building priorities have been completed and mirror the identified needs of the educational program. A progressive, purpose built and aesthetically appealing campus as well as one respectful and inclusive of the important heritage buildings is the successful outcome.

Delivery of a quality 21st century education, preservation of a reputation for innovation in learning and teaching and all within the context of a highly competitive market, demands that the College implement effective financial management to ensure implementation of its future directions. This has been evidenced by strategies such as annual reviews of the 5-Year Financial Plan, regular reporting to Board and Council and review of enrolment data to assist in financial forecasting and planning.

While compliance with WHS requirements is mandatory, the College has clearly built a culture that embraces and ensures a safe working environment for all and is reflective of its Dominican ethos that values its significant human resource. This included the appointment of a WHS Coordinator to oversee all work safety requirements, inclusion of WHS in all Staff Meeting agendas and implementation of Annual Safety Audits.

The process used to review the College mission, culture, organisational health and effectiveness to determine the next set of priorities

Through a series of activities St Mary's College has taken a look back at its history and foundation, mission and guiding charism. This included an historical retrospective with present and past scholars, parents from both present and past, teaching and support staff and members of the Dominican congregation. The process was a very joyous and proud reflection exercise that gave a strong indication that the mission of the early founders was in good hands, evolving healthily into the present context and thriving to honour the vision of the founding sisters.

The College has examined the data of graduating groups, to analyse achievement, pathways and choices of students. SACE and NAPLAN data has been interrogated and compared with other schools and colleges. Conversations with the community and past students gave a clear view of a strong and positive focus on relationships, and an enduring respect and care between students and with the staff. The national and local context has been examined and the place and capacity of the College to meet the demands of the future, including professional standards, curriculum requirements, Catholic and public education imperatives and trends in Australian and international education.

Dialogue occurred regarding girls education, women's' participation in the workforce and university/training sectors, the focus and the issues of work/life choices and equity were examined. Partnerships have been reviewed and the engagement of the College with the wider industrial and business communities has been broadened. These links have formed vital reflection on the curriculum offered and its relevance to contemporary life, particularly for girls today and women of the future.

Staff have examined their own capacity as teachers and support staff and explored the priorities they see necessary for future growth and development of themselves as service providers and professional educators as well as the directions that the College needs to take to ensure the programs and services are contemporary and leading edge.

The notion of Learning Communities has formed and grown over time as a way of engaging in authentic professional learning and in establishing a research culture that better uses evidence base as a means of informing teaching. The continual struggle to achieve a standard of competency and sophistication in the application of digital technologies and social media has also been primary in discussions over time.

The question of “what would Dominic do?” has been brought into conversations about the future of the College and ways of achieving its mission in the light of that charism. That and the practical implementation by staff of the mission of the Dominican sisters to form women who are independent and critical thinkers and active, well-educated contributors to society who take a strong place in its leadership and economic, social and spiritual development has been ongoing.

The previous College Strategic Plan was used to assess the distance travelled by the school and its community over a number of priorities that were determined in 2007 – 2008.

As proposals have formed about how the College will continue this work, feedback and staff input into the way these are shaped into priorities has been gained.

Goal Statement 1:

THE ENDLESS SEARCH FOR TRUTH

St Mary's College will be a faith community in the Dominican tradition affirming & nurturing the spiritual journey of each member. This will be at the heart of all our future endeavours.

Dominican Formation

We will further develop & nurture our charism so that our community continues to find new ways of being Dominican today

Liturgy and Prayer

We will provide opportunities to explore the divine and help make meaning that connects the world of students and staff with the sacred.

Retreats

We will continue to embrace the Dominican practice of deep contemplation that calls us to reflect on our experience of faith, relationships and to grow in self-awareness and understanding of our place in the world.

Social Justice

We will empower students to create a more just and equitable world through contemplation and action.

RE Curriculum

We will endeavour to provide a rigorous learning framework that supports deep, informed practical engagement with our Catholic tradition.

Indigenous Perspectives

We will provide diverse experiences for students to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the richness of Indigenous cultures and traditions, whilst acknowledging the significant issues facing contemporary Indigenous Australians.

Ecological Perspectives

We will explore contemporary practices, knowledge and language that will help us better appreciate our deep connection to and respect for all creation.



Goal Statement 2:

STUDENT WELLBEING

St Mary's College will create a vibrant social & emotional learning environment where girls develop lifelong resilience to become women of independence and intelligence in their personal and community life.

Social Education

We will implement a Positive Education Framework across the whole school to develop resilience skills within students.

Restorative Justice

We will continue to operate out of Restorative Justice principles and practices, with all members of the College community.

Student Leadership

We will continue to build community and student leadership within the College through the coordination of whole school events.

Inclusivity and Diversity

We will respect and value the uniqueness of the individual and celebrate how it enhances and contributes to the diversity of the College community.

Communication

We will continue to be a community open in its communication practices to build a collaborative culture with all relevant stakeholders.



Goal Statement 3:

A LEARNING CULTURE

St Mary's College will create an innovative learning community that recognises and celebrates the diversity of our learners. Students will develop a deep relationship with their learning through being encouraged to seize every opportunity and take positive risks to reach their potential. We work with the students to create an environment that places high expectations on them while providing high levels of support for them.

Curriculum and Learning: Three Phases

We will provide a learning environment that reflects strategic professional planning, promotes an inclusive teaching culture and employs contemporary assessment practices and policies.

Heart of Learning: Whole School Approach

We will develop an ethos of learning that has at its foundation a shared language, commitment and responsibility by all community members.

Supporting Learning: Whole School Approach

We will continue to explore and develop innovative structures and reflective professional practices that enhances all learning across the F-12 spectrum

Present and Future Learning: ICTs

We will assess current practices and explore the future possibilities and opportunities relating to both the integration and promotion of ICTs in all facets of learning in order to enhance student achievement.



Goal Statement 4:

STEWARDS OF OUR PAST, PLACE AND PEOPLE

St Mary's College will sustain and develop its resources and facilities to support all educational programs. Sound human resource and financial management will underpin the success of all College outcomes.

Resources and Development

We will invest in resources and facilities through the creation of a 2015 – 2020 Master Plan.

Sustainability

We will create a physically enhanced campus through refurbishment, landscaping and planning for new facilities with a lens of ecological sustainability.

Heritage and History

We will at all times respect our heritage buildings so that they espouse the traditions and history of the College.

Governance

We will commit to a future governance model of a Public Juridic Person by being accountable to the trustees of Dominican Education Australia.

We will seek the support, challenge and direction from the Parent College Council and Board of Directors

Parent and Industry Partnerships

We will explore partnerships and infrastructures that foster development of community and engagement with learning.

Human Resources/WHS

We will commit to a safe working environment and the wellbeing of staff by compliance with WHS requirements and the creation of a positive workforce culture.

Financial Management

We will maintain and annually review the 5 Year Financial Plan in consultation with the College Board of Directors and College Council.



From here...

St Mary's College is in good heart and good health. It has a culture that reflects the spirit and ethos of its founders and carries the messages of the Gospel into real life for the students and staff.

The staff and members of the school community involved in the process of review and reflection demonstrated openness and courage in providing a critique of the present operations and outcomes of the school and in providing insight into the future reforms necessary to keep the college on the edge of innovation, change and quality education.

This document carries a strong message of mission, vision, intent, priorities and review and accountability mechanisms so that the College can continue the journey started by the founding Sisters of the formation of a school that successfully educates young women of and for the future.