



*LINK 18: St Porter's Primary School (Queensland)*

*Case Study*

*PUBLIC PURPOSES OF SCHOOL ARC PROJECT*

[Note: pseudonyms have been used throughout]

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## ***Summary of Key Findings***

### **1. Public purposes (PPs) as a focus for the school**

- Students are the key focus of the school
- There is a strong focus on PPs as underpinning values/beliefs of the school, albeit, these are framed in Catholic/Christian/Mary MacKillop traditions and beliefs
- Evidence of an overall coherence in valuing and practising these across principal, staff (teaching & support), parents
- Social outcomes are highly valued along with academic outcomes – and the religious development of students
- The (community) reputation of the school reflects PPs, again as framed in Catholic/Christian/Mary MacKillop traditions and beliefs – it is a quality small Catholic primary school

### **2. School culture**

- Reflecting above – this is supportive, caring and collaborative and inclusive rather than competitive and exclusive
- The principal is the “heart” of school culture – evident through actions, conversations, modelling
- The Catholic/Christian/Mary MacKillop traditions and beliefs drive the values of the school and their enactment
- The school is a happy harmonious one with an inclusive culture and one accepting of diversity
- Strong supportive culture among staff, parents and students – there is real sense of community among students, parents and staff
- There is a sense of calmness, serenity across the school

### **3. Teaching staff**

- Very supportive of focus and direction of school
- Staff are strongly supportive of principal
- Teachers are supportive of each other – they work collaboratively, not competitively
- There is a general sense that they are happy to be at St Porter’s
- Staff seem to be of "one mind" on 2 different levels, spiritual & professional

### **4. Other staff**

- As above – they are supportive and positive about building an inclusive collaborative school framed around Catholic/Christian/Mary MacKillop traditions and beliefs
- High levels of collaboration and support evident across teaching and other staff

### **5. Parent/community**

- Very supportive of principal and school in building an inclusive collaborative school framed by Catholic/Christian/Mary MacKillop traditions and beliefs

## **6. Students**

- The students present as happy, confident and supportive
- There is some diversity across the student population – this is accepted by the school and support provided as necessary
- There is a sense that the culture of the school strongly and positively contributes to their growth and development

## **7. Curriculum**

- Social outcomes are developed along with academic outcomes
- Students have access to a diverse curriculum – despite the fact it is a small school
- Students with needs are catered for – supported by resources as can be

## **8. Leadership**

- Principal has a very clear vision for the school – one framed around Catholic/Christian/Mary MacKillop traditions and beliefs
- The principal is critical to school focus, direction, values etc

## **Methodology for the case study**

This case study was conducted across 2008 and undertaken by an academic and a research assistant from The University of Queensland. The Research Assistant was responsible for the major part of the data collection.

The school, St Porter's Catholic Primary School was identified as a possible case study site following discussions with various staff from the Catholic Education Office, staff who were well informed about the particular strengths of Catholic primary schools in Brisbane and near-Brisbane. The school was believed to exhibit practices consistent with notions of public purposes and where social outcomes were a prominent focus for the school, framed within a Catholic set of values and understandings.

The principal was contacted by email in mid-2008 in the first instance and provided with information about the research project (nature, focus, scope) and invited to consider if she might be willing to be involved in the project. Following a positive response, the academic visited the school and spoke further with the principal about the project. During this visit, he suggested he and the Research Assistant attend a staff meeting (to which key parents of the school should be invited) to outline the project and seek agreement among staff and parents for participation. This was held in August. Those attending the meeting were informed that they would be asked to contribute their ideas through involvement in interviews and/or focus groups about the school and the purposes of schooling and how these purposes might be enacted. Both staff and parents responded enthusiastically to the invitation.

Data for the case study were collected across October to December, 2008. The Research Assistant undertook the major data collection role, conducting interviews, focus groups and collecting materials (e.g. documents, photographs) for analysis. Across all such visits, the school community members were welcoming and supportive of the researchers and willingly gave of their time (and their ideas) to the data collection processes.

**Data Sources** for the case study included:

- School Documents
  - Annual Report 2008
  - Strategic Renewal Plan 2007-2011
  - Prospectus
  - Principal Self Review 2008
  - Principal Report 2007
  - Parent Handbook
  - School Community Document
  - Website
- Interview, Focus Groups and Observations

All interviews and focus groups were recorded using a digital recorder then transcribed in full. Transcripts were returned to interviewees for final comment and agreement. The final agreed to transcripts were then analysed.

- Principal
- Receptionist
- Acting Principal/ Religious Education
- Learning Support Teacher (Part Time)
- LOTE Teacher (Part Time)
- Guidance office (Part Time)
- Parent (n=2)
- Focus Groups with teachers (n= 2)
- Student Written Comments

- Reflective Journal

The Research Assistant kept a reflective journal throughout the data collection, recording thoughts and impressions about the school, actions of the principal, staff and parents and evidence of (public) purposes of education in action. These were regularly shared with The academic for discussion, with such reflections adding again to the richness of the case study data.

## **Brief history of St Porter's**

St Porter's school "was opened on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1916 by the Sisters of St Joseph and has a strong tradition of the charisma of Mary MacKillop" who in 1866, "founded the Religious Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph in Penola, South Australia" with the aim of bringing "Catholic Education to the children of poor, working class families in Australia. The motivation of Mary MacKillop's life lay in her intense concern for the poor, her deeply held Catholic faith and her enduring trust in the providence of God.... She is also honoured for her works in responding to people in need – the orphaned, the sick, the destitute and the abandoned members of society" (Parent Handbook, p. 4).

"Mary MacKillop's spirit lives on in all people who follow her example and charisma in meeting the needs in today's society – working for a Christian influence in all areas of education and respecting the human dignity of each person in all circumstances of life" (Parent Handbook, p. 4)

### **1. Important statements about the school**

The **School Vision** is:

"Catholic Education – Living and learning with gospel values" (School Community Booklet, p.1)

The **School Motto** is:

"To love to care to give" (Staff Handbook, p.1)

The school **Mission Statement** is:

“The Mission of St Porter’s school community, Nandy is to enhance the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, physical and aesthetic development of each child. We are called to accomplish this in the context of a caring Catholic-Christian community. Therefore, we must facilitate the development of attitudes and behaviour that will build up this sense of community” (Parent Handbook, p. 5)

The following elements are contained within the Mission Statement: community, quality education, witness to faith, compassion, respect, joy, justice, and shared ministry. Each aspect of the Mission Statement is briefly explained in the Parent Handbook (p. 5) and also on the school website.

The **School Song** for St Porter’s was written by Middle School students and is entitled “Big Hearts”. The lyrics tend to reflect the overall concept of love and acceptance that is apparent both within the written values of the school and also the daily enactment of those values in a practical sense.

### **BIG HEARTS**

#### **Chorus**

St Porter’s is a great school  
Small but very strong  
We all have big hearts  
And everyone belongs

#### **Verse 1**

We are great in spirit  
With a faith that we all share  
In Blessed Mary’s footsteps  
To give, to love, to care

#### **Verse 2**

At sport we do our best  
Together we make one team  
Running, swimming, jumping high  
We reach out to our dream

#### **Chorus**

#### **Verse 3**

We value all that we can learn  
Through history, prayer and wonder  
Shining brighter than the sun  
We are St Porter’s Nandy

#### **RAP**

Nandy, Nandy,  
Join us up on the hill  
Our school (our school) is open wide  
So with one voice come and sing (Sing)  
Sing with all your might. **Chorus**

## **School context**

### **a. Student enrolment and profile**

St Porter's is one of 107 Catholic Primary Schools within the Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education community of schools. There are 154 students from Prep to Year 7. At the time of the study, St Porter's was undergoing building renovations which meant that four classes were being held in demountable classrooms for approximately eight weeks, and a further two classes (Years 1 and 2) were being conducted in a garage area. Regardless of the rather obvious difficulties for all involved, particularly in the case of wet weather, the teachers had made a particular effort to create a sense of belonging and ownership for each class. Photographs of students were displayed in some classrooms, together with a wide variety of artwork. Every effort was made to maintain a positive outlook, a strong sense of continuity, and create a welcoming atmosphere for anyone who ventured into the makeshift classrooms (Journal, p. 3). Each classroom had its own sacred corner where a number of items were displayed, including a hand-painted Peruvian cross (sometimes hanging on a wall) depicting either the death or resurrection of Christ (photograph available), perhaps a candle or a short prayer.

### **b. Description (physical) of St Porter's**

The grounds of St Porter's are quite small, although the play area, consisting mostly of cement, was much better once the demountable buildings were removed. Colourfully decorated planter pots, which had been part of an art program, were placed around the grounds (photograph available).

## **Principal & leadership**

Margaret, the principal, was initially appointed as acting principal of St Porter's in 2004. She views her purpose as principal as one of serving the community "in a way that reflects the gospel values of truth, love and justice" (Principal Self Review, p. 2). In her review Margaret states, "As a Catholic and a leader I am in a privileged position of influence to enrich the lives of students, staff and other members of the school community through the explicit living of my faith and demonstrated commitment to the Gospel values" (p. 3). As a result of interviews, observations and personal interactions with Margaret, it would appear that Margaret's faith has a significant and ongoing impact on who she is as a person. She seems to have an impact on those around her (Refer to Comments re Principal Section). As such it seems that the explicit living of her faith in relation to Gospel values is something which Margaret regards seriously and undertakes with deep sincerity.

When considering the importance of relationships within the school community, Margaret explains:

*for me, the development and nurturing of relationships is integral to who I am as a leader. Nothing can be achieved as well as when there exists mutually trusting and respectful partnerships. In honouring these relationships I strive always to be present in the moment – no matter how busy. For me people come first (Principal Self Review, p. 7).*

Margaret is a very pleasant person who exhibits a very caring, almost motherly, manner and attitude toward all those who attend or who are associated with St Porter's. Her office is neat and uncluttered and boasts a canvas displaying student artwork depicting "What St Porter's means to me". A number of such canvasses were created as part of a yearly school art program and are now displayed in various parts of the school, including the front office and hallways (photograph available).

Parents openly acknowledge their appreciation of her personal interest and concern for their own well-being as well as that of their children. It was observed that after an afternoon tea Margaret did not hesitate in taking on the washing-up duties. She did not stand back and allow others to take on the task. Her actions had the appearance of 'normality', the usual. Margaret is also reported to have worked tirelessly on the gourmet hot dog stand during Nandy Fest, an activity which commenced at 6am on the morning of a wee Keith. Generally there is a very positive attitude toward Margaret, her manner, and her accomplishments within the school, from teaching and administration staff as well as parents (Journal p. 7).

#### **a. The role of the principal at St Porter's**

The role of principal at St Porter's was described as one which sets the tone for the school:

*We've been very fortunate here having a good principal, and she's always very accepting of people and supportive of the staff. I think it makes a big difference when the staff feel supported by the principal because they know – and to feel appreciated for the work they do too. I mean, you don't always need pats on the back but if you know what you're doing matters to the principal, and they acknowledge when you do good things... (Learning Support teacher, p. 8).*

Margaret's initial comments to Sandra, a potential parent of the school significantly influenced Sandra when looking for a school for her children:

*We went to a few different schools and, I don't know, Margaret was just so welcoming and spoke highly of the staff and the other pupils that were here, and it was just, wow. For such a small school, the way she put the school across and I thought, yep, give it a go, and we loved it (Sandra, parent, p. 4).*

At times Sandra also takes the opportunity to discuss issues with Margaret:

*She's the daughter's principal, but also a friend, you know what I mean? You can go and have a conversation with her and think, oh, that's just a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. Thank you, Margaret. And yeah, I'm on cloud nine again for a few more weeks.... The whole school, the teachers – you can talk to any one of them (Sandra, p. 5).*

Pat, the school administration officer explains that in her position she must (and does) have the support of the principal to operate effectively. She describes the qualities of "evenness, calmness, listening" (p. 3) to be evident while Margaret has held the



position of Principal. She has also observed the manner in which Margaret has taken responsibility for problem solving with the parents. The task is not ignored or left to someone else to deal with (p. 3).

### **b. Challenges for Principal**

Staff members list some of the challenges as being “maintaining what we’ve got and being able to keep it working”, “enhancing community profile”, (Focus Group 1, p. 10), increasing the school numbers, and increasing funding. One teacher also saw a challenge in “Lifting our school profile in our area” (Keith, p. 11).

Pat sees the low socio-economic states of some families at the school as a challenge. As a small school with less available funding than some other schools, they are less able to offer the amount of additional support that can, at times, be required by some families. However, St Porter’s does have a strong commitment to providing caring consideration for families, including their financial situations (Pat, p. 3)

## **School Culture and Leadership**

There is a genuine warmth in the St Porter’s school community. “It’s just got that sort of welcoming sort of friendly – everyone gets along. Everyone is equal” (Focus Group 2, p. 7).

*You don’t have to belong to my group for me to talk to you, that sort of feel. Even right across parents, staff, anyone. Anyone arrives of a morning, it’s just good morning. It doesn’t matter if we haven’t seen you before. You might just be here actually to have an interview at the office or something but nobody knows that or worries about that. It’s just good morning (Focus Group 2, pp7-8).*

This type of statement is typical of the attitude of staff and parents within the St Porter’s school environment.

A culture of caring is actively promoted at St Porter’s. Rather than the teachers pushing or lecturing the students on the various values desirable for the school the grade 7s as part of the leadership team are encouraged to lead, both in the weekly assemblies and also in the playground. Comments from participants in one of the Focus Groups (2) help to illustrate this:

*The kids are what we’d like to focus on. But it’s not us lecturing the kids saying come on, there’s not enough of this. We let the grade 7s do that. They can sort of put it in their wording and say this week we’re looking - but they don’t say it hasn’t been very good; kids are left out and not being welcomed in. They say what we’re looking for this week is kids welcoming others into their game. If you notice someone is playing by themselves, maybe you’d like to invite them in to play with you. So it’s phrasing things in a positive way too as opposed to the negative (p. 16).*

This culture has become part of the school over a lengthy period of time. “That just seems to have just kept flowing through because as the young ones come in and this is

what they see and this is what they know and anyone new who I think then comes into the school just sees that and just fits in with it”.

*And I suppose too, new teachers that come in too have seen the way that the school is and then they just come in and carry on with that. I think it’s something that’s been passed down and through the school as well as all of the things that the teachers do as well (Focus Groups 2, p. 16)*

The culture of caring that has permeated St Porter’s is very apparent to those outside the school who may visit from time to time. For example one staff member commented about the reactions and feelings of supply teachers coming to the school:

*I think when the teachers are so happy here it says something; that the number of people who comment in the staffroom, like relief teachers who comment to us, I love it when Margaret rings up and says she needs me today. When the phone rings they shudder, but if they hear Margaret’s – happy to go to St Porter’s” (Focus Group 2, p. 17).*

Another member of the group extended the comment with, “Even the Life Education officers (external visitor to the school) made the comment, I love coming to this school”

*It’s my favourite school. Come once a year to a place like this and they’re only here for three days, but love coming back to here. They said we just walk into the staffroom and feel like we’re welcome back (p. 17).*

## **Social Outcomes**

The buddy systems in place tend to foster interaction between the younger and older members of the school community, thereby building confidence for both age groups, and supporting the ongoing social development of all students. Mrs X, a parent, explains, “I like the buddy systems that they have, the support that they all join up and builds the confidence for the young ones with the old ones. Gets the older ones to look after somebody, take responsibility, it’s important” (p. 11). This type of activity is closely linked to the nature of St Porter’s and the helping and supporting characteristics of the Mary MacKillop ethos upon which it is built.

There is a strong focus on building a sense of community in and across the school, involving students, parents and staff. This focus is strongly evident in the Mission Statement and in school activities/practices. The following extracts from the schools’ website (and Mission Statement) illustrate this:

### *Compassion*

- We aim to develop a sensitivity to the real needs of all individuals and respond to these needs with love and concern. We witness to Christ by our bonds of concern and our service to those in need.

### *Respect*

- We strive to impart to each child a sense of self-worth and a respect for others, their abilities and property.

### *Joy*

- We aim to maintain a happy, friendly atmosphere at St Porter's and ensure everyone feels welcome here.

### *Justice*

- We strive to develop the Christian virtue of justice by encouraging social awareness, respecting the dignity of others and providing for the needs of various groups. We will constantly reflect on the school's processes and practices in the light of this virtue.

### *Shared Ministry*

- Each group in the school community accepts its shared responsibility in this mission of the school.

## **Staff**

“The staff of St Porter's is made up of 13 teachers and five teacher aides, administration and grounds staff. One teacher has a Masters Degree, 9 have Bachelor Degrees and 3 have Diplomas of Teaching and Religious Education” (School Website, 2009; Annual Report).

The staffroom is located near the front office, providing easy access for the principal, administration staff, visiting staff. It also has external access for teachers from the playground area. An effort has been made to make it bright and colourful and each teacher has his/her own locker. Two large candles, one with the school emblem grace a table near the door. These are used during staff prayer sessions each Wednesday morning (Journal, p. 1).

The signage on the staff lockers reflects something of the positive outlook of St Porter's by highlighting what is “treasured” at the school, and also by reminding the readers to “celebrate” those treasures. Margaret explained it as highlighting those things which are already recognised as being good and worthwhile, while at the same time expressing an appreciation of those things. Some of the items listed included the Learning Support Program, the friendly and welcoming nature of the school and the staff who work there, the resources available, the sense of community within the school environment, the library, and the sharing of faith (Journal p. 1-2).

All staff members appeared comfortable with the researcher wandering around freely, dropping into classrooms unannounced and observing either lessons or students' work. In some cases the researcher was quickly included in whatever was happening in the classroom at the time. For example, while working through a class rehearsal for the weekly assembly, the class teacher invited The Research Assistant's opinion as she encouraged the students not to be nervous or worry if they made a mistake, as it would be highly likely that no one would even notice. Staff were also interested to learn more about the research project, and were happy to share any information that might be helpful (Journal, p. 4).

Staff interaction was positive and comfortable and consisted of general stories and what might be termed “typical” conversation around the staffroom table during the breaks. Beyond this, however, there did appear to be genuine concern for any staff member who was facing a personal difficulty, and also a strong sense of comradeship and celebration at any good news shared by another staff member (Journal, p. 4). For example the announcement of a confirmation of a pregnancy was accompanied by a copy of the 3D ultrasound of the soon to be new arrival displayed on the whiteboard, together with a selection of small cakes with a mix of pink or blue icing. There was an obvious sense of genuine joy and excitement among the staff as a result of the announcement and what appeared to be a real presence of “brotherly love”. As principal, Margaret confirmed, without hesitation, the fact that the staff are genuinely concerned for and caring toward each other, particularly if there are those in facing specific difficulties (Journal, p. 6).

### **c. Comments regarding St Porter’s staff**

The staff at St Porter’s are described as:

*always prepared to go the extra mile.... Last week one of the kids didn’t have any food, and hadn’t had any breakfast, and so the teacher had some of her lunch she gave to the child – rather than see her go hungry. We have lunches – sandwiches in the freezer as well for kids who go hungry. The staff – they kind of embrace the whole spirit of the school too, you know. They try and live out what we’re trying to teach the children too. So they’re good examples to the children (Learning Support teacher, pp. 7-8).*

Of the teachers, Sandra says, “They get to know each individual child.... It’s like they’ve got another 30 children. It’s like they’re all their own children type thing, which is just – you don’t get that at a lot of places” (Sandra, p. 4). Sandra further explains:

*whether they’re in school or out of school, they’re exactly the same person; treat the kids exactly the same way, which I think is fantastic. I think it’s absolutely fantastic (p. 5). You can come to them at any time and have a chat. They’ll always make time for you. They’re never too busy. If it’s not straight away it will be when they can fit us in. I think the kids like that as well, knowing that there is someone there to talk to. They don’t have to bottle it up. They can find someone to talk to (Sandra, p. 9)*

In relation to the Middle Years program Sandra says, “but those two teachers, Ann and Jenny, have put in 150 percent to interact the both classes in together, and the same thing: no kid is left behind. They’re catering for all levels, and you think the amount of work that must have gone into that.... But they’ve done it, and the kids all get along brilliantly” (p. 6).

### **d. Specialist Staff**

#### **(a) Learning Support**

The learning support teacher has worked at St Porter's for a period of 9 years. She chose to apply for the position as she lives close by and she prefers a small school environment "because you get to know most of the children and the staff and, you know, it's much – much more on a personable sort of level" (Transcript, p. 1). She highlights 'acceptance' as a key feature of the school, "That's the way they are. I guess it's the acceptance that – of people despite their differences....we've got a bit of a mix of nationalities too, so that helps with acceptance as well" (Transcript, p. 4). The acceptance factor also appears to be apparent in relation to behavioural issues.

*We've got a few children with behaviour problems, but really the kids don't hold grudges or anything, They just think, oh, well that's the way they are and just get on – I mean, you know, they might get annoyed or – they're just normal kids – but they don't seem to hold that against the person forever and ever, you know. They just sort of get over it fairly quickly* (Transcript, p. 4).

### **(b) LOTE**

The LOTE teacher was appointed to St Porter's 5 years ago and has been teaching Italian to Years 4-7 on a one day per week basis. She is currently enrolled in a Masters degree in TESOL (Transcript, p. 2). One of the key aims is to have the children "become aware that there is a world outside of Australia" and "at least develop the cultural knowledge, the awareness, and perhaps tolerance for others" (LOTE, p. 3). Beyond the basic language content other developmental aims include teamwork, conflict resolution, and group skills and communication (LOTE, p. 4). Although this teacher is only present 1 day each week, she too highlights the positive sense of community and family in the school:

*I think it is very community oriented...it's got a very nice atmosphere. When you walk in, it seems like all parents know the teachers, and they all create a nice little community.... It's very – almost like a family. You can sense the spirit here* (LOTE, p. 5).

### **(c) Guidance Officer**

John works as a guidance officer across four schools, which can be quite challenging, "but the flexibility of the schools and the principals that have always been in the schools have made it quite manageable and it gives you a lot of variety" (John, p. 2). He enjoys seeing "the kids actually overcome obstacles and just get on with their life and make some sort of small successes in their life" (p. 3).

From his position of visiting a number of other schools, John highlights the advantage of the social outcomes for the students of St Porter's:

*The social outcomes for the kids in this school I think on the whole are quite positive, probably because it is a very diverse cultural school and I suppose because I go to other schools I do see that there would be several of the children at this school who would probably be on the outside in some of my other schools. They would probably not be accepted as readily as they are here. So I would say that socially all the children here are accepted for who they are and whatever they bring to the school. Even if that's quite dysfunctional, it seems to be okay. Whereas I think in another school they would be quite quickly isolated* (John, p. 6).

#### **(d) Assistant Principal (Religious Education) Position**

Keith, the Assistant Principal is currently completing a Masters degree in education and administration (p. 5), and has a keen interest in people and building relationships with the various members of the school community. He says, “the more experiences you have the more it enables you to build relationships and that’s what it is. It’s good relationships with the children, staff, parents, the community. And that allows you to gain more experiences because everyone has a story” (Transcript, pp. 1-2). He places a strong emphasis on being authentic and maintaining integrity (p. 3). “My touchstone I suppose for myself is what would Jesus do, basically in this situation” (p. 3). He views “a love of learning” (p. 4) as extremely important and also as something which he has to model for the students

#### **(e) Administration Officer**

Pat has had the excellent opportunity to view St Porter’s from the perspective of both a parent and also the school administration officer. She has had a child at St Porter’s for a period of 7 years and describes the school as a “happy, safe learning environment” where the students are able “to acquire a life-long love for learning” and achieve at their own individual level (Pat, p. 1). Pat works at the school by choice (10 years) and states plainly that if she wasn’t happy, she wouldn’t be there (Pat, p. 2).

From an administrative perspective Pat explains that everyone, including visitors, parents and cleaners are made to feel welcome. As an outside researcher, The Research Assistant believes she was made to feel not only welcome, but also that nothing was too much trouble. She felt she only had only to make a request should something be needed, such as the written work from the students. Staff were more than happy to share information with The Research Assistant about their school or show her around. Pat fulfils a very multifaceted role due to the small size of St Porter’s. This can also be very stressful, but Pat clearly emphasises the degree to which the stress is alleviated by the leadership within the school.

#### **(f) Individual Staff Members**

Staff Focus Group 1 members highlight some of the advantages of St Porter’s as being a small school with a close knit community:

*You’re a face, not a number. You know all the children – not just your class type of thing (p. 5). Another member of the group stated, for me to get up and come to work is a good thing. I’ve been at schools where I haven’t felt like that. You know, where to do it was a bit of a struggle” (p. 5). Staff are happy to be here (p. 6) and describe St Porter’s as “so comfortable” (p. 5). It is the whole relationships thing.... The staff are just all friendly, altogether (p. 6).*

### **Parents**

Priorities in the school for parents appear to centre around a few key issues. Firstly, the quality of teaching and education available at St Porter’s: “teaching them to learn the basics, the maths and the reading” (Parent X, p. 2). In addition to the academic ‘basics’, the teaching and modelling of religion was considered a significant element

in relation to the growth and development of the child. Parent X comments that “the religion is very important for us, that’s why we chose a Catholic school” (p. 2.). It’s just teaching him (her son) the right of God and Jesus and what’s happening out there, and I just think that sort of makes a person” (p. 4).

The small school and community atmosphere present at St Porter’s serves as another draw card for the parents who have made educational choices for their children.

At St Porter’s parents seem to support each other. Mrs X highlights the benefits of the support freely given to both parents and students:

*Just everyone getting along and the great support from parents if something’s happening that we all sort of look out for each other and we look out for each other’s child if there’s, like if somebody can’t make it on time at school, we just all pitch in and help each other or take that person home or just, yeah, it’s a great communication.... That small community is just, we all know each other and we know all about each other to help support.... We’ve made great friends from that and that’s very important for me personally (p. 6).*

Mrs X explains that because most of the students and therefore parents have been together since preschool, that although there has been some change, “the majority of the group still stick together” (p. 7)

Sandra views St Porter’s as a “friendly” place to be (p. 16) and would encourage parents to “come up and have a look for themselves” (p. 16)

#### **e. Parents and Friends Association**

A substantial amount of fundraising takes place at St Porter’s as the result of an active P and F Association. “We have a good P and F group here....there’s a good group of parents that will get in and get the job done; a heap of fundraising for the school. We have school discos where ... the grade 7s do like, the MC-ing, DJ-ing of the night” (Sandra, p. 11). This is another occasion when the unity of the school is obvious. Sandra sees it this way:

*The big kids dancing with the little kids, and other siblings that aren’t even at this school getting in, and it’s just – it’s quite magical to watch. They’re all just as one. There’s no – oh you’re dancing silly, or you’re doing it the wrong way. It’s just – doesn’t matter how you do it; you just get in there and do it (p. 11).*

There appears to be a prevailing ‘attitude of gratitude’ from the staff to the parents which causes the parents to feel they, as well as their efforts, are truly valued. For example Sandra speaks of the fundraising work at NandyFest:

*We normally have a hot dog stand there and we make our hot dogs and sell drinks and everything, and the parents all get along and we just have such a good time.... And the teachers will even come in and – on their weeKeithd, and come in and help out; cook hamburgers or hot dogs.... Then we get back*

*to school the next day, they'll always thank the parents for what a wonderful job we've done, and for any kids that have helped out (p. 12).*

## **Students with Special Needs**

Staff at St Porter's proved extremely helpful when a child with special needs was enrolled at the school. Parent X explains that it "was taKeith straight on board, they took it up and got the funding, so I was very impressed" (p. 2). There is a sense that the child is watched over by both staff and students. For example, Mrs X states, "my child doesn't get lost, everyone knows him and respects that and they also help when he has difficulties so I can see a huge plus there" (p. 3). One-on-one or small groups sessions have proven helpful and there has been a marked improvement over the time the child has been attending St Porter's. Regular meetings between Mrs X and teachers have helped to keep the parent up to date with her son's progress.

Sandra's daughter, now in Year 5 came to St Porter's in Year 3. Sandra explains:

*My daughter has a bit of trouble and they're really good up here. They're on top of it. She's getting the help she needs, which is just fantastic. Our last school, she was sort of left behind, and didn't get the help, so by the time we come up here she was – not backward, but needing – really needing the help, and they've jumped on it, and she's getting the help she needs (Sandra, p. 2).*

Sandra believes this to be a necessary part of the educational process, although she was unaware of it when she first enrolled her children at St Porter's (p. 3). "I only have to mention to the teachers that, look, I think she's having trouble here and here. Got her assessed. ... And it's all working out" (Sandra, p. 3).

## **Opportunities for Students**

St Porter's offers a wide variety of opportunities for students. The LOTE teacher summarises just some of the opportunities available for students:

*I think it is quite well balanced because it seems like, apart from the academic focus, there is still place – time and place here for other things, like sport and performances, musicals and things like that...and obviously LOTE is a part of it (LOTE, p. 7).*

### **Sporting opportunities**

Students are encouraged to take part in sporting opportunities both at a school level and also a zone level. Mrs X's son has "been attached to Zone 6 for swimming so he knows he's representing his school, so that's been very important for him to just stand up for himself" (p. 5). "For such a small school, we have quite a few good swimmers and athletes and that, which is good". Referring to swimming, "we always get a groups of kids to go on to represent us in the zones" (Sandra, p. 13).

### **Prayer Assemblies**

Prayer assemblies are held each week. Each class takes a turn at conducting the assembly. This includes opening the assembly with a greeting, perhaps followed by a



song and a short message or item which, in the assembly witnessed by The Research Assistant, centred around the theme of the love of God, lighting candles and prayer. Students appeared quite comfortable speaking individually, and had no difficulty in handling microphones or sound equipment. A considerable amount of practice and encouragement had obviously gone into the preparation of the event (Journal, p. 6).

Mrs X commented:

*the prayer assemblies are wonderful and I know that for my child it's been great because it's just teaching him to be comfortable in front of people and to speak, so I've seen a huge improvement there at the assemblies in particular" (p. 4). ... That's building up their confidence and not just for my son, I can see that for a lot of children. I've seen them grow just with confidence and they'll pick up the microphone and they'll speak, they don't worry about who's out in front and they can be funny and we laugh with them, we don't laugh at them (p. 8).*

Prayer seems to permeate the life of the school. It appears closely linked with both class and school activity:

*We have a Mary MacKillop prayer after afternoon tea. It comes through the loudspeakers to the whole school. It starts with quiet music so the whole school just quietens for that time after afternoon tea. At the beginning of the week the student leaders go around and just ask the children in the other classes if they have anything that they'd like to pray for (Focus group 1, teacher).*

Another member of Focus Group 1 continued the description of prayer at St Porter's:

*it's just lovely to hear what the kids see as important and how they see people needing help. So they pray about all kinds of things and they get offered up over the loudspeakers and the children all join in throughout the whole school and say the Mary MacKillop prayer. It's just that one part of the day where we're all united (Focus Group 1, p. 12).*

Class prayer also forms a valuable part of daily activity:

*We have a class prayer with the older children so they tend to plan it and organise it themselves. We'll have four children each week that prepare a class prayer and we all join in". "We're also doing the shared prayer whereby they can sit in a circle and if they want to pray – and we focus on the resurrection crucifix that we have got – the Peruvian ones – and they can just hold that and they can pray themselves. They pass it on and if someone wants to share a prayer out loud they can. It's the most beautiful time of the day. The kids are very respectful of that (Focus Group 1, p. 14).*

Members from the Staff Focus Group 2 also highlighted the quiet time and prayer as a key aspect of the day and shared some of their experiences with the children:

*We bring ours down to the floor and sit around it and have a bit of just prayer quiet time. Sometimes we might just pass the cross around the circle and*

*everyone has an opportunity and we say little prayers and if they want to say their prayer out aloud, what they would like to pray for, they do. If they don't, they don't have to and they just hold onto and say it quietly to themselves. Then we say a little prayer together at the end of it as well. It adds to their sort of spiritual, their sort of ability to be able to stop and focus and centre and I suppose reflect and think about things" (Focus group 2, p. 11). That's part of our whole day (Focus Group 2, p.12).*

The acceptance of everyone and the respect for the opinions of each individual that is characteristic of St Porter's is also apparent in this type of activity. A member of Focus Group 2 points out the way in which this can occur in a classroom setting.

*If someone says – like they've had prayers before like - things like I pray that my dad won't have a heart attack because he smokes too much or I hope that my mum wants to lose, pray my mum wants to lose weight. Funny little wordings like that or for my grasshopper, that he jumped away. They accept that...it's not a giggle...just an acceptance (p. 12)*

There is clear consideration of providing the students at St Porter's with a variety of opportunities regarding prayer and spirituality. Keith offers some examples, "Opportunities to participate in liturgies, opportunities to participate in prayer assemblies, opportunities to participate in personal prayer. Give them different types of opportunities of a different type of prayer. It's not all just the Our Father. As many experiences of liturgy as we can get in our situation here" (Keith, p. 9).

## **Student activities**

### **f. St Porter's Got Talent**

The school talent show is held each year and is not restricted to a specific time frame or a select number of acts. Any student who wishes to participate is not only free to do so, but welcome regardless of the degree of talent apparent. For example, a student may wish to simply tell a joke or present a comedy sketch, sing or play an instrument. The focus is on encouragement and involvement rather than a need for perfection. A staff member commented:

*it is just phenomenal that it's open to everybody and anybody. So it's not like we can only fit so many numbers in. We just make it a bigger concert if we've got more people involved. And everyone from the littlies to the big ones can do whatever they like. So if it's a violin going eeeee, eeeee, eeeee, at the end of their performance they all get this big roar, cheering. They clap them along. They seem to encourage it more if it's not as good a quality. They seem to...they lift them up... (Focus Group 2, p. 9).*

Sandra is particularly pleased with her daughter's personal development:

*She used to be very shy. Like, we had St Porter's got Talent, and no way in the world, last year even, would she have got up on that stage and danced in front of the whole school; and she did it yesterday on her own...in front of her father and I, and looked out at the audience instead of head down. She looked out. She did it. We were just so proud. (Sandra, p. 7).*

Referring to the school, principal and staff members, Sandra says, “They’ve got that attitude, you can – you can do it, and the kids have taken that on” (p. 7). Sandra’s pride in her daughter’s achievement is unmistakable, “Yes she can do it, and she did it yesterday. So it was just, yeah, mind blowing for us yesterday to see her up there.... I thought, is that our child up there? Where before she wouldn’t have – wouldn’t have done that. Like she’s even shy at home. She won’t dance in front of her own brothers and sisters...”

#### **g. Choir**

St Porter’s has a choir “that goes to different performances throughout the year and sings” (Sandra, p. 13).

#### **h. Gardening Club**

This gives the students the opportunity to interact with nature, while taking responsibility for their own school environment. “I think even without the gardening club, each class has their own section of gardens around the school, and they have to weed and do that. I mean, go round and have a look. It’s looking quite good” (Sandra, p. 13)

#### **i. Excursions**

There have been a variety of different excursions for students attending St Porter’s such as a visit to the Smart Train, Roma Street Parklands, and the Mary MacKillop Centre (Sandra, p. 14). “I love camps and excursions and will never forget all the good times I shared at St Porter’s” (Student 14).

## **2. Students at St Porter’s**

The students of St Porter’s were described by John (Guidance officer) as:

*Puppies, lovely little kids, absolute puppies. I mean they’re a very humble kid. A very – different kid to you get in a private school. A lot of the times a couple of the other schools I go to, they’re a little bit more attuned to the fact that their parents are paying fees and things like that whereas in this school kids wouldn’t have a clue their parents pay fees. They would think that school is free and that’s the way it is. They are; they’re a very humble sort of a kid, a very nice kid (John, p. 10).*

A number of students wrote about their experiences at St Porter’s for this case study. The majority of comments were centred around values which are a strong component of the principles openly taught at the school, although some students mentioned the enjoyment they found in some of the activities available to them at St Porter’s. These activities included the school camp (Students 11 & 14), Leadership opportunities (Students 11 & 14), and sporting events such as swimming and athletics (Student 8). A number of the values of St Porter’s are obviously enacted in the lives of students. Sandra explains:

*they see someone in need, you won’t just get one child coming up to help them; you’ll get about five of them going up to help that one, and you think, wow. Very supportive. Whether you’re coming first in a race or last in a race, they’re behind you 110 percent....Whether you’re black, red, blue or*

*white, the kids don't see it like that. You're just – you're you, which I think is, in these days, with the amount of different cultures in Australia, it's unique to have a group that doesn't see that the person sitting beside them as – you know what I mean (Sandra, p.15).*

### **Comments by Students**

*I have learned that this school celebrates success by having awards given out on assemblies and students and staff congratulating you. This school has taught me to be very considerate of everyone (Student 1).*

*I have been here for 6 years and during my time here I have learnt how to be confident in what I do and in how I act. I have learnt to be responsible and take responsibility for my actions. I have learnt to act with kindness and care for others. I have also learnt that if you respect others they will do the same for you and I have grown to trust the teachers and students around me (Student 2).*

*During my time at St Porter's I have learned to respect and be friendly to others and to be honest by telling the truth (Student 6).*

*During my time at St Porter's I have learnt to be loving and caring, giving and honest, and forgiving and responsible and confident. And the way I was taught that was by being around loving and caring people. That's why I try to be loving and caring (Student 7). This comment is supported by a staff comment which highlighted the need to constantly model appropriate behaviour, "That value type thing is I think, very much a part of what we do and what we say to the children" (Focus Group 1, p. 11).*

This appears to be the general opinion of staff at St Porter's, as there is a very real desire to embrace and openly live the charisma of Mary MacKillop.

*I have made excellent friends and hope to always be friends with them. I value friendship and honesty and that is what I have been taught at St Porter's (Student 10).*

*I have been at St Porter's for 3 years. It seems like I have been here forever. I have the bestest friends here. Our whole school is like one big family. Everyone is encouraged, loved and cared for (Student 11).*

*The teachers parents and staff have all taught me so much about how to care for one another and respect each other's differences, similarities and opinions. Everyone isn't afraid to be themselves and not worry about what others think (Student 14).*

All of these comments reflect a positive and supportive school culture, one that is inclusive, welcoming, constructive and supportive of student growth and development.

## Summary of Responses

VALUE	STUDENTS (n=18)	TOTAL
Celebrates success - awards - assemblies - Birthday cards	1; 4	2
Consideration of others	1; 2	2
Respect	2; 4; 5; 6; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16	13
Confidence	2; 7; 12; 18	4
Honesty	3; 6; 8; 10; 14	5
Positive Outlook	6	1
Persistence	6; 18	2
Responsibility	2; 7; 8; 12; 16; 18	6
Loving & Caring	1; 4; 7; 11; 12; 14; 15	7
Friendship	8; 10; 11; 14; 17	5

## Curriculum

The curriculum at St Porter's is designed to help students develop the attributes of lifelong learning and to help them to grow towards being a person who is a:

- Reflective self-directed learner
- Quality producer
- Community contributor
- Leader and collaborator
- Effective communicator
- Active investigator
- Designer and creator.

All students are taught the following Key Learning Areas:

- Religious Education
- English
- Mathematics
- Study of Society and the Environment
- Science
- The Arts
- Health and Physical Education
- LOTE (Italian – Yrs 4-7)
- Technology (School Website, 2009)

### **a. Middle Schooling**

“The teachers in the senior school (Years 5, 6, and 7) incorporate *Middle Schooling* philosophy and perspectives into their planning for student learning. Students in the middle years of schooling share an array of rapidly changing, diverse and often challenging qualities. Other than infancy, research identifies the ages of approximately 10 to 14 years as a time when children develop and grow more rapidly than during any other developmental stage. These change processes have direct implications for student learning in the middle years of schooling. This is a time when young people make choices that impact significantly on the rest of their lives in a rapidly changing world, where, for example:

- they have access to extensive and sophisticated informational sources outside of the school and family;
- they are the target of mass media and advertising’
- they are participants in a society that has a growing consumer culture; and,
- they will participate in a world where the certainty of learning one set of job-related skills for a lifetime of employment will not be sufficient.

(From *Pathways for Middle Schooling: Walking the Talk*. Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Brisbane, May 2004)

Middle Schooling refers to practices that make formal education responsive and appropriate to the needs of young adolescents engaging them proactively in their learning through appropriate curriculum, pedagogy and school organisation. The following aspects of learning are addressed in the Middle School program at St. Joseph's:

*Curriculum:* the teachers from St Porter’s plan cooperatively to develop units of work to provide learning experiences that connect with and are relevant to young adolescent learners and learning processes that explicitly develop reading, writing, critical thinking, decision-making and creativity.

*Pedagogy:* teachers work as a team to know and understand their students well and use powerful teaching strategies to challenge and extend students in a supportive environment.

*School Organisation:*

Middle Schooling 1 is a group of students from Years 6 & 7 and Middle Schooling 2 consists of students from Years 5 & 6. The MS groups join together for communal prayer and reflection, class meetings and literacy block” (School website, 2009).

### **b. Music**

A range of musical activities is available to students attending St Porter’s.

Music is offered as part of the core curriculum at St Porter’s. All classes from P – 7 receive weekly music lessons from a specialist music teacher.

The Choir is available to boys and girls to join from Year 3. The children rehearse each week for thirty minutes.

Students from P – 7 are able to access the strings program (viola, violin and cello). An instrumental music teacher conducts lessons in groups of two or three in school time on a rotational timetable. Instruments can be provided by parents or rented. Children are able to perform in small ensembles and a concert for parents is conducted annually (School website, 2009).

### **c. Sport**

“All students in Years 1-7 participate in the Swimming Program in Terms 1 & 4 and the students in Prep join the program in Term 4. Swimming lessons are held at the Nudgee College Swim School for P-7. Students travel to and from the pool by bus. Qualified swim coaches from the Nudgee College Swim School conduct all lessons. A note from the parent to the classroom teacher is required if the child is unable to participate due to a medical condition. All children are required to wear a bathing cap to their swimming lessons. Girls are required to wear a one-piece bathing suit. Costs for the swimming program are included in the school fees.

The Perceptual Motor Program (PMP) assists the development of gross motor skills in the early years” (School website, 2009).

In Term Two, interschool sport is organised as follows: -

AFL for boys/Netball for girls - Years 4-7

Tennis lessons are offered after school each Monday and are conducted by Fancutt’s Tennis at the Corpus Christi College courts

### **Curriculum Priorities**

*I think the academic is our main priority because that’s, you know, that’s our job to ...teach the children the academics; but we do also prioritise, you know, the social and what type of people the children are growing up to be.... I think the religious emphasis too on, you know, being good Christians and stuff, that has a lot to do with it as well (Learning Support, p. 4-5).*

St Porter’s tends to consider not only the academic outcomes for the students but also the personal growth and development of the whole child. This is highlighted through discussion in Focus Group 1:

*It’s not just education as in the academic side of it; that it is the whole child. They bring so much with them when they walk into our classrooms and you’ve got to address all of it otherwise you’re not going to get anywhere work wise.... If they’re not happy and content it’s going to limit their learning. You need to look at the whole child and their families as well and what they bring with them”. Another staff member commented “it’s not trying to have them attain a certain level or a certain score at the end but it’s that they feel good about themselves because they have achieved what they can achieve. That’s in all areas like academic, social and emotional (Focus Group 1, p.4).*

The staff appear to be very aware of the changing nature of society and the challenges it can bring to schools, teachers and to teaching. One member of focus group 1 raised the issue of Year 3 students (8 years of age) being treated for depression and described it as “scary stuff” (p. 5).

#### **d. Religious Program**

There is a very strong school-based religious based program operating at St Porter’s, centring around the charisma of Mary MacKillop and the values she modelled throughout her life. Keith (AP/RE teacher) describes his role as one of:

*supporting the teachers with the RE, giving feedback, planning with the teachers with the RE. As a staff we’ve written a unit for a third term to be implemented across the school on Mary MacKillop we...Mary MacKillop and the values I suppose and spirituality where she came from. Sacramental programs...it’s different that we do a school-based sacramental program. So we have three sacraments in 6 months and that’s school based. A lot of other areas is parish based but we run it all, liturgies, planning liturgies, planning assemblies... (pp. 5-6).*

The effect of the religious program at St Porter’s appears to be very powerful and quite significant. Keith explains the three fold outworking of the program as:

*their sense of joy, sense of compassion through the MacKillop Care...inclusiveness: the kids here have a great ability to include others – that comes from home too but it’s here at this school. I suppose they’re the three. Every Catholic school I’ve been at, they have different values but probably they’d be the three critical (Keith, p. 6).*

The religious values underpinning the school philosophy are further demonstrated “through the staff. I think we encourage the children through liturgies; as I said through sacred time, through the Mary MacKillop prayer. So we can do it in a very structured way.... The modelling is important. It’s walk-the-talk I suppose at the end of the day” (Keith, p. 7).

*I suppose it gets back to the way we act, the way we treat the children, with respect. How they’re asked to treat – it’s that modelling I suppose but it’s probably living the Gospel from our point of view as staff. It’s setting the example, whether it’s the way we speak to someone with respect, whether we speak to our colleagues, we speak to parents, students with respect, treat everyone as, yeah, just following those values, those Gospel values (Keith, p. 9).*

Not surprisingly, the teaching of the Catholic faith is an important element of St Porter’s. Keith further explains:

*there is a knowledge – there is a content that is to be known. That comes from Brisbane Catholic Education which I was on the writing committees with. There’s the faith component and the knowledge component. You can have a*



*lot of faith but no knowledge and that doesn't really help because it doesn't give you further understanding of the faith. So the content is important. We have it as a KLA, key learning area. We assess as on any other subject and we, yeah, have four lots of 30 minutes averages say 120 minutes a week. That is important too because we are all on different journeys and some of us have our faith at different stages (Keith, p. 8).*

Keith raises yet another very interesting point:

*There's two schools I've taught in and Nandy is on of them that has the word 'joy' in their mission statement and I think that's a very, very important value to have as a school.... I think, yeah, at the end of the day that sense of joy, whether it's from staff, students, I think is very, very important. I think it permeates and I think it does here too (Keith, p. 2).*

John (Guidance officer) adds some comments regarding the religious philosophy and history of the school:

*When I came here there was Sister Francine. She was the last of the Josephites. She is a lovely lady. She's a top lady, Francine, I had a lot of time for her.... So that has carried on and a few of the teachers are here still from that time so they have a very strong view about the Josephites and Mary MacKillop's impact on education and they believe that – I can't speak for them but I think that they showed a belief that they have a role to carry on that tradition and I think they believe it – what's the word – authentically. It's certainly not something that's just a façade.... They do embrace it...and one particular lady I mentioned before, I've never seen a person develop the kids so socially, is a lady from that vintage and she just does it so well. It's quite incredible to watch her actually. I think she's gifted. Yeah, and it doesn't matter what age they are; whether she's teaching grad 7s or whether she's teaching very young children. It doesn't matter. She seems to be able to balance it across the board.... I think that that ethos, the Mary MacKillop ethos, if it's handled in a positive way it is a very important part of the school; I would say one of the most dynamic things of the school (John, p. 11)*

#### **e. Additional programs**

Mrs X highlights the need for learning, but also expresses a strong appreciation for the other programs, such as sport, music and art, being offered at St Porter's.

*School I see as learning, but also as an enjoyment, you don't want to send your child to school and they've got to sit down at the desk all day from whoa to go, and all those other things that happen around it, like the sport and the music and the art I think are really great breakdowns for that" (p. 7). For her child, the art program has been particularly beneficial. "Art is just wonderful and it's really helped my son, in particular, he wouldn't draw, wouldn't do anything and now like even if it's dinosaurs he'll draw it, just find a specific thing he likes, but yeah, that's the art has really brought him out (p. 7).*

### **Buddy System**

The buddy system is employed throughout the school, and also includes staff members as well as the students. “We have buddies for the younger grades – well, actually every class has a buddy class. That goes for staff too. If we have new staff, they get a buddy on staff...” (Learning Support, p. 5). The buddy support for new staff continues for one year. It is aimed at helping new staff members to settle in “because there are lots of things, you know, individual to different schools that new staff might not sort of realise...” (Learning support, p.5).

The year 6s buddy the Preps and the Year 7s buddy the Year 1s, “so there’s a fairly good built-in support network for what’s happening here” (Focus Group 1, p.9).

### **Cool Schools Program**

This program involves peer mediation and was found to be quite successful within the school (Learning Support, p. 5). It helped the students to learn the benefit of “I” statements and to utilise these skills in daily interactions:

*I know when we did the Cool Schools program, everyone learnt to use “I” statements, and the teachers will say, use an “I” statement, please, when the kids sort of come up, they did this, or they did that, and the teachers say, use your ‘I’ statement please; and the kids all know what that is. So I guess it’s just, you know, living it out in every day activities (Learning Support, p. 7).*

#### **f. Leadership – Year 7**

The student leadership within the school is shared across Year 7. There are no school captains:

*The older students get a chance to share that leadership and the younger kids look forward to it because it’s a real – they see it as something really valuable to have” (Focus group 1, p. 7). To accomplish this “the older students go through a program at the start and they learn how to mediate and then they get divided into groups and they have rostered days.... As well as being mediators, if need be, they also look for stars of the playground (Focus Groups p. 8).*

These students are able to receive a certificate for endeavouring to live the values being taught at the school.

*The Year Sevens do a leadership – sort of leadership training and things, and they’re sort of all seen as school leaders, and they’re given various responsibilities around the school (Learning Support, p. 5).*

*We have peer mediators here. That’s another – from the kids’ point of view, if they are having trouble in the playground, you know who to go and find, the peer – with their little jackets on. And they help sort it out (Sandra, p. 9).*

*I love being a school leader and fulfilling our roles as leaders. Being at St Porter’s has taught me so much about responsibility, friendship and honesty (Student 14).*

## Some general comments about the school

In summary, a number of positive qualities were identified by members of the school community:

- Small school (Parent X, p.10; Learning support, p. 6; Focus Group 1 p.7; Pat, p. 1)
- “well resourced” (Keith, p. 10)
- Opportunities
- Inclusiveness

*This is a really good school to come to for its inclusiveness. You know, if you're at a bigger school, only usually the best children get to do things, but here everyone has a go* (Learning Support, p. 6)

- Christian values (Pat, p. 3); Catholic ethos (Pat, p. 1)
- Strong sense of community (Parent X, p. 10)
- the family atmosphere” (Focus Group 1, p. 7)

*I think it's a hidden gem.... It's got a great feel. It's the whole environment. It's a welcoming environment. It's a positive environment but supportive”* (Keith, p. 10)

- “caring and supportive environment” (Pat, p. 3)
- Academically strong (Parent X, p. 10)

*Come to St Porter's, it's a great small school, the kids get along with the teachers and the parents are lovely. Education-wise I think there's enough there for them to learn, there's a variety and there's that community spirit between the parish, the Sisters, yeah* (Parent X, p. 10).