Focus on Identity
Mount Evelyn Christian School

Our Mission
We provide Parent-governed, Christ-centred schooling with learning experiences that challenge each student to actively live for God in His world, while partnering with Christian parents in the nurture of their children at a price affordable to those who are committed.

MECS Vision
Seeking the Kingdom of God in Education
Focus on Identity

Introduction

Welcome to the Mount Evelyn Christian School Focus on Identity booklet. We trust it will answer any questions you may have about MECS.

The book is divided into 5 parts:

- **Direction** - a transforming biblical perspective
- **Partnership** - genuine connection between home and school
- **Discipleship** - life equipped to make a difference
- **Distinctive** - creative all-of-life curriculum
- **Community** - vibrant learning environment

The material here is not meant to be read like a book from start to finish. Rather, we’ve designed it for you to go to those questions that most interest you. You may find the checklist on the next page a helpful way to keep track of what you have covered. Start with the questions that most interest you and then check out those responses.
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Direction
a transforming
biblical perspective
Where did MECS come from?

MECS began as a dream in the mid-1950s! Christian parents dreamed of education with a Christian perspective for their children – and grandchildren. In the 1960s, they organised themselves and were very active in raising funds. In 1964, the pioneers formed their Association of Parents for Christian Education, Mount Evelyn and accelerated the pace of work to establish a Christian school. With daring and vision in 1970, they purchased our wonderful six-hectare school property. Their dreams were realised when they opened Mount Evelyn Christian Primary School on the 3rd February 1973 – a full 19 years after the very first fundraising effort. The school opened with three teachers teaching 80 children in grades Prep to 6 in three composite groups.

Why a Christian school?

We have two main motives for operating as a Christian school. The first is that we believe that Jesus Christ is to be Lord over every single part of life, including the education of our children. The second is that God has given to parents, the responsibility of nurturing their children. Their education is a major part of that.

MECS sees its primary task as unfolding God's world with children in the educational domain (families and church also do this but in other domains of life). This involves students understanding that they are God's creative handiwork, unique, precious and loved, made in God's image and gifted in many ways. They also learn how to work and play within the world, and what God asks of them. As students understand themselves, their world, and have a healthy view of the calling God has for them, they are well equipped and positioned to engage as active participants in society and as disciples of the Lord.

Such a holistic understanding stands in stark contrast to the broad Australian view that schools exist for the purpose of providing students with basic skills and the where-with-all to get a good job at the end of the process. One is a view of God's kingdom and the call to serve, the other, the material world in which one needs to work. Two very different views about education.

Why MECS and not a State school?

In Australia, we are aware that State schools are required to be ‘secular’ – supposedly neutral to any particular religion. We believe, however, that it’s impossible to be ‘neutral’ with regard to religious belief. In attempting to be neutral, State schools default to a commitment to secularism, which believes that everything must be explained in terms of things we can experience with our senses and that there’s nothing beyond the world of our natural experience. It’s not hard to see that this is actually a religious viewpoint in itself and contrary to Christian faith. A child in a State school will absorb this view without realising it unless great care is taken. We believe it actually undermines the nurture in faith that parents desire for their children. The New Testament witness is clear: that Jesus Christ created all things, he sustains them, and they exist in and for him. So there is no part of life that is unrelated to God or is ‘neutral’ with respect to him. This is why we have a Christian school – we do education under the Lordship of Christ.

Doesn’t teaching Christian moral values make a school Christian?

Many people think that the Christian message is one of ‘doing the right thing’; living a righteous life for then God will smile on you and reward you for good deeds. This is not the gospel. Whilst Christians do seek to respond to God’s love through living righteously, the core of the Christian gospel starts with recognising our brokenness and our need for a Saviour in Jesus Christ. The general Australian misconception that Christianity is simply about morality misconstrues and limits the power of the Christian story. So at MECS, we will not merely teach about morals, but we will look at all of life and see how a Biblical perspective affects and transforms it.

Doesn’t evangelising in school make a school Christian?

It is common that people think Christian schools are about planting and growing the Christian faith within children and young people. This occasionally occurs within our school context, but it isn’t a defining feature of what makes MECS a Christian school. We do not have Chapel services with an appeal to faith. We do not have teachers seeing their most important task as bringing students to faith. We don’t seek to find any opportunity to slip in a faith challenge. This doesn’t mean we are embarrassed about the gospel or lacking confidence in its power. Like with a moralistic view, we do not want to restrict the Christian message to just one part.
Isn’t it the Christian teachers and their relationships with students that make a school Christian?

MECS only employs staff who are in agreement with our Educational Creed, a clear statement of the Christian gospel in relation to education. Teachers teach out of the faith they profess and relate to students in a warm, engaging and respectful way. Even though teachers make mistakes, they seek to be ‘Christ-like’ in their manner and example. Many people feel that this role model and the healthy relationship between student and teacher is the essential ingredient of Christian education. Our view is that this is only one aspect of the bigger picture of Christian education. Primarily the key calling of the Christian school is to lead the way with biblically grounded learning.

Doesn’t providing Christian pastoral care make a school Christian?

Some people think that Christian education is all about the way teachers and chaplains care for the students. While this is important, pastoral care for students is not the defining feature for MECS. All sorts of schools these days have Christian chaplains (which is great), but that doesn’t make them Christian schools. You can read more about our holistic approach to pastoral care in the question, “How do you provide pastoral care for students?”

Doesn’t doing religious things make a school Christian?

When we reduce the Christian message to just a part of a bigger picture, we refer to this as having a dualistic view, one that splits life into two parts: the secular (all the normal everyday things we do) and the sacred or spiritual (the ‘God’ or religious things). Many Australians think that this is how God, Christianity, faith, and the church work. Christianity is just about religiosity: Sundays, good morals, devotions, teaching a bible lesson, a prayer, adding a Scripture verse, holding a chapel service. MECS thoroughly rejects this dualistic approach. We believe that we cannot take the model of school that we find in society and just add a bit of religious ‘icing’. It would be like putting chocolate icing on a vanilla cake and calling it a chocolate cake. MECS isn’t just about putting a bit of ‘icing on the cake’. You could also look at the question: “How much religion or ‘God talk’ happens during the average week?” on page 17.

What is a Christian school?

Whilst righteous living, sharing the gospel story, strong relationships, and participating in religious activity are important to us at MECS, they do not define a Christian school. The DEFINING is the key point here.

Our outlook is a holistic one. It’s not icing but rather a whole new loaf of bread, where one’s basic outlook on life, one’s faith, is like the yeast that forms the very shape and character of the loaf. A holistic view of Christian education has every aspect of the school’s life brought under the Lordship of Christ. This is essentially the view that all we do is a response to the God we serve. The practice of all schools reflects some basic religious views of life. Even the supposed secular (no religion) State school reflects some key religious views about life. So first and foremost, MECS is a Christian school through its key calling to lead in learning. What this means is that we have the special task of helping each student to discover the meaning and structure of the world we live in, and to move beyond discovery to a real and well thought out Christian response to that world.

How is MECS different from other Christian schools?

There are many different types of faith-based schools in our area, some run by churches, and others with a very loose connection to a church or the Christian faith. MECS takes its ‘Christian’ label very seriously and develops its approach to education in faithful response to that foundation.

MECS stands in the tradition of the reformation that sees the world as God’s handiwork, fallen through sin, in need of salvation that can only be found through Jesus Christ. In this understanding, those who celebrate Christ as Lord approach their task in life as people redeemed by God. This approach will dynamically transform the type of educational practice of those committed to it. That is why many label it as a transformational approach to education.

Developing Christian education is a natural part of the Christian life because God calls his people to offer all that they do as praise to him. Christian educators at MECS seek to transform all teaching and learning because God wants to be Lord of all they do. Any close observer of MECS would see a wide range of ways in which aspects of school life have been transformed.

How does faith touch every area of school life?

In the Bible, we learn that Jesus Christ created all things and sustains them. There is no part of life that is unrelated to God. As the apostle Paul wrote, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). One of the forfathers of Christian education once declared: “There is not one square inch of the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ does not say: ‘Mine!’.” So we believe that faith touches all of education. When some people hear this view, they may wonder about how faith affects certain subjects that appear to be non-religious. It is helpful to think about mathematics as an example. Someone might ask, “How does Christianity relate to maths? Isn’t ‘2+2=4’ the same for everyone?” The reality is no it is not. For many children, 2+2 can be a meaningless set of symbols when divorced from reality. In fact, our faith means that we will treat mathematics as one way of thinking about God’s world. Children do not learn “mathematics” by merely accumulating mathematical knowledge or by mastering mathematical procedures. Rather they develop abilities to perceive and think mathematically about the world. For most students, at least until the teenage years, this is only possible when mathematics education explores the mathematical aspects of creation.

Our primary obligation is to ensure that we do not present mathematics as the most important way to gain truth about the world. Working from a biblically informed worldview, we teach that mathematics is one means of deepening our understanding of some aspects of the world, so that we might be better equipped to serve God and our neighbours.

We have only used one example here, but we’d be happy to discuss with you how faith affects other areas of the curriculum too. Please ask us.
I’ve heard you think that school is not just about getting a good job. If it’s not that, what is it?

Most Australians think that the purpose of schools in our secular western society is to equip students with the educational basics, like literacy and numeracy, and to prepare students for employment. Whilst MECS does that very well, schools have a much richer job than straightforward job preparation. Schools are not places that simply prepare students for adult life as if a child at school isn’t already living in the real world. Schools are microcosms of life – places where students solve problems, choose what to wear, settle disputes with each other, learn about their gifts, etc., just like adult life. Those who reduce schools to mere preparatory grounds severely limit the breadth and depth of the education a school will provide.

A key weakness of the ‘preparation for work’ idea (the goal of economic rationalism) is that so many students are basically being set up for failure. Sadly, students who do not have a clear vocational pathway, or who do not achieve the ‘required’ ATAR, or who have gifts outside of traditional core educational areas, will more than likely view their educational achievements as being inadequate. Yet they are, in reality, well-rounded, balanced, insightful and healthy individuals.

What does ‘Equipping for Life’ mean?

For us, ‘equipping for life’ refers to a broad and deep educational purpose. There are many aspects and areas of life for which schools need to equip students. We want them to be prepared for life in all its richness and variety, both while they are at school and after they leave. We want to equip them to be, life-long learners, trustworthy, committed, informed, discerning, critical citizens, wise consumers of goods, services, and entertainment, friends, marriage partners, parents, community members and leaders, sports players and leisure seekers. We want to equip our students with an understanding of the meaning and implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all areas of life. That means we want them to be ‘salt and light’ in the world. We hope for them to be transformative disciples in and for the world (but not of the world). We want to enable them to be servants and able to love their neighbours (local and global). We aspire for them to “do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with their God” (Micah 6:8). We work to equip them to be responsible and caring stewards of God’s good, but fallen, creation.

Why do you talk so much about ‘Christian perspectives’?

One of the key ways we see Christianity relating to what and how students learn is by developing a ‘Christian perspective’ for every area of the curriculum. When we talk about Christian perspectives, we are referring to a Christian approach to a particular area of the curriculum, teaching and learning. For example, we seek to understand Australian history, or a novel, or biology, or water from a Christian point of view. Another way we speak about this is to talk about understanding all areas of the curriculum through the eyes of faith.

An image we find helpful is to imagine the Christian faith as a pair of glasses that we look through. Our teachers work hard at wearing those glasses and understanding the impact that the glasses have. Teachers explain the views that their own glasses give them. They go on to assist students to recognise that the views they have also result from the perspective their glasses give them. Recognition and understanding of perspective (what the glasses see) is critical for Christian education.

You frequently talk about a holistic education. What does that mean?

A holistic education is one in which we work from our Christian point of view to address the broad range of educational needs and interests for each child. We view all children as created in the image of God. They have diverse ways of knowing the world, possess unique gifts and express wonderful characteristics. We do not believe that education should merely emphasise academic or intellectual development. When we make intellectual development the sole focus of schooling, other areas of students’ lives can be downplayed. They are treated as less important and tend to be neglected or even denigrated.

By contrast, a holistic education recognises the importance and validity of a range of abilities and gifts. Students have a range of ways of knowing and relating to the world. We want to provide an education that touches on and challenges each student to learn, develop and grow in as many areas of knowledge, skill and performance as possible, and not just the traditional ‘academic subjects.’ We always try to see each child as a whole person, with a wonderfully complex mix of academic and non-academic abilities and interests. We want to provide opportunities for students to develop their athletic and sporting abilities, their musical and artistic skills, their abilities to craft and make things, and so on. We love to help those with both non-academic and academic abilities to excel – to learn and be wise with all their abilities to the glory of God.

Who lets a Christian school operate?

The Victorian Registrations and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) is a government body that enforces a broad range of standards and guidelines for independent schools. The VRQA ensures that schools achieve these standards and are trustworthy recipients of government financial support. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development have assessed and approved the operation of our kindergarten. We can assure you that MECS is a registered Kindergarten to Year 12 school that complies with all State and Federal government regulations.
Partnership
genuine connection
between home and
school
Why such a strong emphasis on parents?

Christian parents understand that their children are gifts from a generous and creative, loving, heavenly Father. They seek to bring up their children to know and love this loving Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. The Scriptures clearly teach that the chief responsibility for the nurture and guidance of children belongs to their parents. Because the education of children has such a significant shaping role, parental responsibility must play a part in that education. This responsibility cannot be hand-balled to governments, businesses, or even churches for that matter. It belongs primarily with parents. That doesn’t mean parents won’t partner with others who can help them, but it does mean parents set the direction and stay involved. This is why MECS emphasises the vital role parents play. The school’s job is to empower parents in their God-given responsibility.

Why is MECS a parent-governed Christian school?

We are a parent-governed Christian school because, in the first place, schools ought to be accountable to the parent community they serve, rather than to the government or to the church. It is to parents that God has given the responsibility of nurturing their children. In response to this, our parents have the vision of Christian education and set the direction for the school. As a result, they are the primary place of accountability for the school management. By contrast, the primary purpose of both governments and churches is not the education of our children, though they may have limited and particular responsibilities to support such education.

Who owns the school?

A not-for-profit association of Christian parents, teachers and past parents owns and maintains MECS. The official name of the owning association is the ‘Association for Christian Education Mount Evelyn Inc’.

The Association elects Board members who, acting on behalf of the Association, govern the school. That means the Board determines policy and broad direction and gives oversight to the Executive (the Principal and other key leaders appointed directly by the Board). The Executive needs to achieve the aims and objectives of the Association for the school. Because the Board is a governing Board, it does not get involved in the day-to-day running of the school, hence it is the Executive who manages the school.

Can you tell me about Association membership?

Those who embrace the vision of the school and subscribe to the Educational Creed may become members of the Association. We encourage all Christian parents to consider becoming members and thereby participate more fully in school life and the governance thereof. Embracing this level of commitment to MECS is vital for the long-term well-being of our educational community. All the information you need to become an Association member can be obtained from the school office. Please ask for an information pack or check out the Association section on our website.

Because partnership is vital to us, parents who are not members are still very welcome and warmly encouraged to get involved in the life of the community. Opportunities for parental participation are numerous.

What are the opportunities for involvement by parents?

We love it when parents are looking for ways to get involved. There are three key ways to be involved. First, it’s the attitude you bring, second it’s assisting your child, and third it’s contributing practically.

First and foremost is the attitude that parents bring along. Are you open to building a strong relationship? Are you actively interested in your child’s educational program? You’ll be able to tell by whether you know what’s happening in your child’s schooling. This involves healthy communication between home and school: reading the material that comes home… getting on the phone when there are a few issues… dropping notes… helping your child use their school diary, and so on.

The second big aspect is assisting your child as a learner. Are you aware of their educational issues and are you working in partnership with their teacher to help make their schooling as successful as possible? Can you assist and guide (not do their work for them)? Do they need extra support? Does your child’s teacher understand their educational issues? Parents are the key to addressing these things.

The third area relates to contributing practically. MECS has a long and rich history of sacrificial service by parents. Parents can assist in classes, supervise exams, help with camps and excursions, care for our beautiful facilities through working bees or other voluntary practical help, join the Association,
serve on the governing Board, participate in the Parents & Friends group (fundraising and community activities), join the canteen roster, pay fees on time, attend concerts and events involving your child, read newsletters and of course interact with teachers.

Why are parents obliged to pay school fees?

School fees are a necessary part of running an independent school. This is because the combined financial support of State and Federal Governments contributes approximately 60% of the cost of running the school. The other 40% comes from school fees that parents and guardians must pay. In the enrolment process, we formalise this understanding through a partnership agreement. This serves to ensure that everyone is clear about these costs.

Each year in Term 4, the school fees for the following year are advertised. Increases are usually in keeping with Educational CPI increases. Parents need to financially plan (being aware of the obligations), before deciding upon enrolment. Please check the web for the latest information (www.mecs.vic.edu.au).

When should school fees be paid and are there any discounts?

Fees are billed at the start of each term. They are due and payable within three weeks of the start of term. If you prefer, you can make Direct Debit arrangements to pay Fortnightly or Monthly from February to November (ten months).

We have two types of fee discounts available to parents. First, we offer discounts for those who choose to pay annually (in February) or bi-annually (in February and July). The annual payment attracts a 5% discount, and bi-annual payments attract a 3% discount. Parents who choose either of these two options assist the school’s cash flow.

The other type of discount is much more significant and focuses on affordability and whole family partnership. It relates to the number of children a family has at MECS. Under this scheme, the first child of a family attracts a full school fee, the second child’s fee is much lower, and the third child’s fee is even lower again. We have also set a maximum school fee ceiling per family. (Please note that for families who have a child in Kindergarten, this child’s fees do not attract a discount, and are not included in the maximum fee ceiling. This is because the government funding is significantly less for kindergarten.)

For more details, please call the school, or email fees@mecs.vic.edu.au, or check the website (www.mecs.vic.edu.au).

What is the Family Bond Payment?

The Family Bond is a common arrangement with fee-paying schools. It provides the school with an indication of the seriousness of the family’s commitment to partnering with the school. Families who are new to MECS are required to pay a one-off Family Bond of $500 as per the Partnership Agreement. This Bond is usually payable before the commencement of tuition, though other payment arrangements can be made. Many schools retain such bonds when the family leaves. MECS however, refunds the Family Bond to families who have students at the school for three or more years.

Please explain the part of your mission statement that says ‘at a price affordable to those who are committed’.

A quick comparison with other independent schools in Melbourne’s Outer East and the Yarra Valley will show that MECS’ fees are at the low end of independent education. MECS has always sought to set fee rates as low as is possible. Of course, if they were too low we would not be able to function. Some of our guidelines for fee setting include budgeting to support the effective running of the school, achieving a small surplus budget to pay for infrastructure, and paying teachers’ wages in reasonable parity to state colleagues.

We recognise that for many people living in the MECS socio-economic demographic area, paying school fees will involve considerable sacrifice. Paying school fees reflects one’s priorities. All parents choose what they will spend their money on and when they put Christian schooling high on their priority list it will mean spending less on other things. We applaud that choice.

Enrolling children in a Christian school is a big step of faith for most families. We’d encourage parents to plan well and trust God in their financial consideration. Repeatedly we have seen that parents who have taken the risk to invest in their children’s education find that God has blessed their financial circumstances.

As a part of its ‘affordability’ goal and desire to bear one another’s burdens, the school does support a proportion of parents who otherwise would not be able to participate in the MECS community. These are not scholarships for smart children, but rather fee assistance for the most needy. Typically, this is not available when starting out with MECS.
What are the school’s criteria for enrolment eligibility?

The school uses the following criteria when weighing up enrolment applications:

• **Parents’ Faith** – The Board has determined that the Christian character of the school program is best served by ensuring that a significant majority of parents personally have a living Christian faith. Even so, parents who do not share our faith can still enrol their children into the school providing they understand that the policies and programs of the school are shaped by our faith.

• **Partnership** – The school is very interested in a long-term partnership relationship with parents who understand MECS. We have a desire for all children in a family to be involved in our educational community. This facilitates a fuller and deeper partnership between school and home. We call this whole family partnership. The character of the partnership relationship is explained in other parts of this booklet. The expectations for parents and the school are explained in the Partnership Agreement. Please ask a Community Relations Officer for a copy if you wish to see it.

• **Understanding of Christian Education** – MECS has developed its particular approach to Christian education based on some core beliefs. These are expressed in the Vision, Mission, Our Five Core Values, Our Belief statements, and our Educational Creed. In a variety of ways, families can show that they have been oriented towards, and can commit to, our form of Christian education.

• **Numbers in Classes** – Each year level, home class and mix of multi-age clusters, has specific ‘class size’ limits. Once a class is full, a ‘waiting list’ commences. When a space becomes available, we notify the next eligible applicant.

• **Full Disclosure** – We expect parents to make full disclosure of known issues that are relevant to a child’s education. Where there are additional education needs, we expect parents to make us aware of the investigations and processes that have taken place, and request copies of all reports. Additional needs are not a basis for exclusion, but a lack of disclosure is.

• **Timing** – Applications are processed as they come in. Ordinarily, it takes approximately two weeks to process an enrolment application. Long-term enrolments are processed in the last term of the second preceding year (i.e. 1 ⅔ years ahead).

• **Mid-year and Post Year 9 Enrolments** – Mid-year enrolments (excluding interstate/overseas movement) are more stringently assessed. Parents are advised that the start of Term 1 and Term 3 are preferred commencement times. The school does not encourage Post Year 9 enrolments. Of course, we are willing to consider any ‘exceptional circumstances’ argument that parents might make.

You say ‘one fee pays all’. Are you sure?

Yes! MECS uses a fee collection system where the school fee is an all-inclusive figure. It really does cover all tuition expenses. This includes camps, excursions and a vast range of incidentals charged as extras by other schools. We do this to be ‘up front’, transparent and parent-friendly and to avoid multiple levels of money management (we don’t want a teacher collecting small amounts for some incidental program that wasn’t anticipated). Good planning allows for this. In the very rare cases where an extra charge appears on a fee bill, it will be because of a student choice, e.g. a Year 11 Vocational course.

The three areas of cost for parents to consider apart from school fees are:

• **School wear** – required or optional school clothing. Provision of school wear is operated by the Parents & Friends group. Costs are separate from school fees.

• **Stationery** can be a significant annual expense. The Parent & Friends group run a stationery order system at the start of each year. This is a fundraiser and a handy, but mostly optional, way for parents to acquire the stationery required. Some parents choose to purchase their stationery apart from this system.

• **Textbooks** – usually there are only a few textbooks, though Senior School students may need quite a number. More often than not, there is a second-hand option available.

Why do you have a Partnership Agreement?

The Partnership Agreement is a summary of the relationship between parents and the school and it outlines the specific expectations the school has of parents. Because relationship is not a ‘one way street’, the Partnership Agreement also outlines what parents can expect of the school. After parents have carefully read and signed off on the Agreement, the Principal signs on behalf of the school. The signing part is called a Declaration and parents are given a copy for their records.

What are the ‘Parent Seminars’ referred to in the Partnership Agreement?

Parents new to MECS are required within the first 2 years of joining MECS, to attend 2 ‘Parent Christian Education Seminars’ where we explain and discuss what is distinctive about MECS. These seminars are a very important element of the partnership arrangement between MECS and parents, and provide an opportunity for the school and parents to explore together what ‘partnership’ means in the context of MECS, and why partnership is such a fundamental element of MECS. They also provide explanation of the MECS approach to curriculum and why we do things the way we do.
Why do you want all of our school-aged children to attend MECS?

MECS wants a partnership with the whole family. That means we believe it’s not good for a family to single out our school as being good for just one particular child. Frequently it happens that an inquiring parent wants to place just one of their children at MECS because of a particular program or because of good pastoral or specialist care; or because it hasn’t worked out well where they’ve been. The poor experience their child has had may be a result of a very narrow educational focus at their previous school. This form of ‘niched’ enrolment has many weaknesses that we want to avoid. The MECS student community needs to be a balanced one with students who have a broad range of gifts. This is our aim because that is the reality of God’s world; it’s a diverse place and not one where ‘one type will fit all’.

Therefore, whilst we welcome all inquiries, we are foremost interested in seeking relationships with parents who are committed to the MECS form of Christian education.

How do you teach Bible?

The Bible is God’s unfolding story of his interaction with his people and the world long ago. That story has meaning for us now. We interact in three main ways with the Bible. First, it is an object of study. Second, it is a guide for our life, thought and learning. Third, it is a means by which we listen to God in our relationship with him.

As an object of study, our students need to know what is in the Bible. They need to know what sort of literature it is and how to read it correctly. In this first purpose, we teach the Bible with faithfulness to its content and trustworthiness.

With the Bible as a guide for thought and learning, we work toward having our curriculum permeated with Biblical ideas. Our teachers spend time together thinking about what it means to teach a particular area of learning from a Christian perspective. We don’t see the Bible as a textbook for the sciences or other areas of academic or non-academic areas of knowledge or learning. It is important to us that we do not use the Bible to extract nice poetic phrases, moral titbits, or verses taken out of context. We don’t simply tack-on a few Bible verses to our lessons. Rather, like a torch, the Bible shines on our path. It aids us as we are going, it reveals holes, cliffs and dangers, and it helps uncover the wonders of creation and God’s grace in the world. As we depend on the Holy Spirit, the Bible provides us with the wisdom we need to respond to life.

Listening to the Bible plays an important part in our relationship with God. Devotion times involve listening to the Bible for this purpose. Students and teachers alike read and listen together to the Word of God as it speaks to us individually and communally. Here we just want to listen to and prayerfully reflect on what God is saying to us through his Spirit in his Word. In this purpose, we are not so much teaching Bible as letting the Bible teach us. We don’t do this as if the devotion sanctifies the rest of the day, or that this is the token religious part of the day. We do it because we want to be keen listeners of God’s word.

Do we have to go to church to apply for enrolment?

We have an open enrolment policy. This means we enrol students from families who do not go to church or express the Christian faith. If that is you, you are welcome to apply for enrolment provided you can support the ethos of the school. To understand that ethos please make sure you read the brochure called ‘Focus on MECS’, and the key parts of this ‘Focus on Identity’ booklet that explain our approach to education.

Even so, we want to ensure that a Christian culture is dominant in the life of the school because the school is here to support parents by providing Christian schooling for their children in harmony with their faith and home practices. Therefore, we can only provide a proportion of places for children from non-Christian families. If your family does not adhere to the Christian faith, you should be ready to discuss this during the enrolment process.

I don’t share your Christian faith, but I want my child to have solid values. Will you provide this?

Our Christian beliefs and values permeate all that we do – in the classroom, in the playground, on the sporting field, on camps, and on excursions. We encourage students to live out these values and beliefs. As students mature, we seek to encourage the development of belief and personal values in a way that respects their personal responsibility. Many Christian values are common in our society because it has been somewhat shaped by them. So all students, whether or not they embrace the Christian faith as their own, will benefit from being exposed to these values and seeing the way they can enrich their lives.

What if my child is not a Christian?

Families who do not express the Christian faith should know that the school will teach and approach its schooling out of a Christian view of life. Four key concepts are important here: Confidence, Openness, Awareness of Perspective, and Individual Choice.

- **Confidence**: The school and its teachers will speak confidently out of a Christian framework of understanding, i.e. God is creator and sustainer of life; God gave us the gift of life and calls us to respond in service to his provision; life is messed up because of sin and there’s a need for a Saviour to rescue us and the world. This confidence shapes and influences our whole approach while at the same time being respectful of openness and individual choice.

- **Openness**: A healthy education needs exposure to, and some understanding of, all the major religions, including the main Australian one, namely secular humanism (a philosophy that rejects the spiritual as a basis for moral reflection and decision-making). Many Australians think of themselves as secular (without religion), though at MECS, we say that that is impossible for everyone has a faith in something; everyone serves some form of god.
• **Awareness of Perspective:** It is important that all students acknowledge that deep beneath their ideas, values and outlook on life are answers to the key religious questions of life. At MECS, we seek to help all students see what set of ‘glasses’ they have on. It is critical to not only acknowledge the set of glasses, but also be able to describe how they shape your vision. We call this view of the world a worldview. To help us understand ‘worldview’ we ask four worldview questions: Who Am I? Where am I? What’s the problem? What’s the remedy? The answers to these four questions, when applied to any person or group or culture, will reveal the worldview and the deeper religious roots that guide it.

• **Individual Choice:** There is a deep respect for each individual student’s need to make their own faith choices. Christianity is not enforced as the one right option. Students are not bible-bashed. Favouritism isn’t given to Christian kids. Correct ‘Christian’ information doesn’t get the best test marks. Students are not subjected to untoward pressure to give ‘Christian’ responses. Each individual has the responsibility to work out their own faith. This is as true for students from Christian homes as for those where that isn’t the faith expressed. We strongly believe that all students have a religious outlook on life and it is best if they can acknowledge that for themselves.

How much religion or ‘God talk’ happens during the average week?

We believe that all of life is connected to the God who creates, sustains and redeems it. Thus, God permeates our thinking, teaching and learning, like yeast in bread. Yet this doesn’t mean we’re always talking about God or using ‘religious language.’ Rather, it means that our Christian worldview functions like glasses through which we view life and the world. Like glasses, our Christian worldview provides clarity and focus. People who wear glasses don’t keep taking them off all the time to inspect or clean them. In the same way, we don’t talk all the time about our Christian worldview ‘glasses’.

However, there are times when we do need to clean or even ‘regrind’ our worldview ‘glasses’. From time to time, we need to concentrate on clarifying and checking whether our Christian approach to a particular area is directed by the Bible. We need to see whether the Scriptures are genuinely shaping our worldview beliefs. We also need to acknowledge the author of life and knowledge and the only one who can save us and our works – Jesus Christ. This means those times of Bible reading, prayer and reflection have a significant place in the life of our school.

Do you have chapel services or devotions? Is that the ‘Christian’ part?

While we have devotion times each day, and times of listening to God’s word and of prayer when we gather (e.g. in assemblies), we do not have a ‘special’ place for doing this. We believe that such devotional times, can occur anywhere. Indeed, the most natural place for them to occur is in the classrooms where students most frequently learn together. So while these devotional times are an important feature of our school, they are not the thing that makes MECS ‘Christian’.

We don’t split life into ‘sacred’ parts and ‘secular’ parts. We firmly believe that this sort of division is contrary to the biblical message and the meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Secular humanism (a philosophy that excludes the spiritual) is very happy to make this division in order to isolate some areas of life from the influence of ‘religion’. They are happy for people to practice their faith and follow their beliefs in the privacy of their homes or churches, but they don’t want Christian (or any other) faith to spread its influence into the so-called public areas of life such as education, science, politics, business, sport, entertainment, etc. We believe that it’s fundamental to the message of the gospel that Jesus Christ is Lord of all areas of life, public and private, sacred and secular.

I just want my child to get a good education and to be happy, is that okay?

A good education and happiness are not bad things to aspire for, as long as we don’t think they are a commodity we can buy. Unfortunately, our culture is quietly influencing parents to become consumers in an enterprise where a child’s education is a commodity that can be purchased. We know that it is not and we are convinced that by discovering that education is about partnership and perspective, you will be able to play a real part in your child’s good and happy education.
Discipleship
life equipped to make a difference
You say your goal for students is discipleship. What does that mean?

Discipleship for us means that we are committed to ensuring that all learning is related to Christian faith. In their discipleship, students grow in their ability to see the world with a biblical perspective, respond to it in ways that honour God, and live in service to God. No matter what your child’s gifts, we want to help develop those gifts as an integral part of their discipleship. Their challenge will be to excel in the use of their gifts for God’s kingdom.

How will you encourage my child to grow in faith?

You will have already seen that the school does not see its primary task as evangelising students. However, within a Christian school community that is communicating its educational message in a way that is consistent with the faith being expressed in Christian homes, it will be natural for Christian students to sense that their faith is being fed and grown. In this sense, the family, church and Christian school work together to nurture and encourage the growth of faith in children. The picture of the growth rings of a tree can be a helpful image. Faith has been planted and nourished by faithful Christian parents wanting to see their own children experience the love of God that they themselves know. The nurture, love and encouragement of the family and many others help to grow that young sapling into a strong tree of faith.

Does the school specifically seek to grow Christian character?

Some Christian educators see the growth of Christian character in young people as their main task (refer to the related topic on moral values on page 7). It is important to us to see our young people grow in maturity and character. It is also important to us what that actually means and how we achieve it.

There are two views about character or moral development that MECS would not support. First, the utilitarian view that says what determines ‘right action’ is based on its consequences, e.g. one doesn’t bully because it hurts someone else. We do not support this view because it is not grounded in God’s truth. Character must be based in what God says not in what outcomes it produces. In our bullying example, this means one doesn’t bully because God says harming others is wrong, and because he calls us to love our ‘neighbour’ and to seek what is right. Second, there is a view that says ‘character’ can be taught by working through a list of virtues, a little like teaching the best traits Jesus displayed. This approach tends to be selective in its understanding of character traits, and it may fail to recognise the place of the Holy Spirit in transforming us.

MECS’ approach to character development is more holistic. We model and exercise good character in all its fullness. We do teach about key character virtues when appropriate, but not in isolation from the other things we teach. This process of living out and building a Christian ethic in the MECS culture presents healthy character as a communal practice. We pursue Christ-likeness together because this is what it means to live healthy lives. The Holy Spirit uses the virtuousness practiced by the community to build up character in children and young people.

How do you help students to understand and critique the confusing and challenging world in which they live?

The world we live in constantly confronts us with issues that can be confusing for adults, let alone children. We approach such issues with a policy of guided exposure. This means we are very careful in the way in which we deal with complex issues and we do not merely shield students from them. We want our students to develop discerning hearts and minds. Thus, teachers will tackle the issues that students will face at a time and in a manner appropriate to their age. They do so with biblical perspective and appropriate critique. We are committed to ensuring that all learning is related to Christian faith. Our students grow in their ability to see the world with a biblical perspective, respond to it in ways that honour God, and live lives in service to God.

How will sending my child to MECS make a difference?

We trust that MECS will make a difference to your child. We also hope that, having been a student at MECS, your child will also make a difference. We expect that MECS will give your child an excellent foundation for living successfully, and the ability to transform their world wherever they find themselves. We aim to equip our students with knowledge, skills, understanding and wisdom so that they’ll be people who make a difference in our society; so that they become citizens who make a constructive contribution to the lives of those around them, and to the places and organisations where they work. We aspire for them to be people who will see wrongs righted, to make justice and mercy prevail, to alleviate brokenness, pain and suffering, and to see creation cared for as God intended. In other words, we hope that they’ll be disciples of Jesus Christ.

How will MECS value my child?

One of our core beliefs is that all children are precious in God’s sight. After all, God created them in his image, and he loves them so much that he sent his only Son to re-establish the relationship with him that had been broken by human rebellion and sin. We recognise that all people are created with a unique variety of gifts and abilities, which are intended to be used to express our love for God and our neighbours, and to take care of God’s creation.

We will not regard some gifts and abilities as more important and valuable than others. We endeavour to recognise and foster the growth and development of all the gifts and abilities of our students. We also recognise that in our society there are skills that are essential if students are to function and live effectively. While seeking to equip your child with these, we also want to provide them with various opportunities to explore and develop other gifts and abilities – whether musical, sporting, artistic, speaking, etc. – that tend to be regarded as less important, but which we regard as contributing just as much to a rich and rewarding life.

What sort of pastoral care do you provide?

The pastoral care of students is vitally important to us. Just as our approach to teaching and learning is holistic, so is our approach to pastoral care. Thus, the most natural carers are teachers. They provide the primary pastoral care for students. It is one of the reasons we limit class sizes. We also provide our teachers with professional support through the school Student Welfare Officer. That Officer also offers pastoral care for children with more complex care needs. Of course, because we are in partnership with families, teachers communicate promptly with parents if there are significant pastoral concerns that may arise in the context of the school. Parents, students and teachers working together usually deal very effectively with most pastoral concerns.
How do you support children with a few extra needs?

Many students have a few extra needs (whether academic, social, and emotional). Some of this is simply because each student is different. Whatever the reason, it is very helpful when parents can spend time with their child's class teacher in order for everyone to understand the nature of the issues and to think through how best to respond. This isn't always easy; however, open communication and a commitment to working through the issues and an educational structure that understands diversity, facilitates strong support outcomes for most students. This is an area of strength at MECS.

What if my child has quite specific educational support needs?

MECS’ size, supportive environment and pastoral care approach means that frequently the school receives requests to enrol children with quite specific social, emotional or learning needs. This occurs even though the school was not established or funded with this as its prime purpose. If you are motivated to approach the school primarily because your child has such needs, you should firstly consider the school's enrolment policy to see whether you would be eligible for consideration.

Before a student with ‘educational support needs’ commences studies at MECS, a significant amount of investigation and ‘learning planning’ occurs. This work is typically undertaken between the parents and the school's Educational Support Coordinator. Parents are requested to be ‘up front’, honest and to provide all reports from specialists at the interview stage. Parents who do not disclose the relevant information or have not sought knowledge that God loves them and has a plan for them.

The school does have a significant number of students with extra needs. These students have been eligible for enrolment because their parents ‘qualified’ under the enrolment guidelines. The issue of the child's special needs is not a factor used for determining eligibility for enrolment.

Various support strategies are considered so that opportunities for educational success are maximised. These include: Parent liaison meetings; collaboratively designed learning plans/ pathways; applications for funding assistance; aide support (sometimes funded by parents); and a range of other resource supports. Parents must note that the comparable funding support within State schools is almost 10 times the amount received in Independent schools. For example, the highest level of funding available at MECS would be around $4000 per child annually; in a State school, the same child would receive funding for a full time Aide.

These issues will be fully discussed after enrolment with the Educational Support Coordinator.

Are there any programs for students who do not thrive in mainstream learning?

MECS is committed to a holistic education that engages the diversity of gifts students have. It doesn't assume that one mainstream approach will be suitable for every student.

An option available for students gifted in vocational skills, is Ranges TEC – a Christian trade training centre offering vocational education and training programs to Year 10, 11 and 12 students. Ranges TEC has been established via a 3-way partnership between MECS, Donvale Christian College and Mountain District Christian School. Students are taught by passionate and experienced Christian trade professionals in the areas of Aeroskills, Carpentry, Engineering, Furniture Making, Horticulture and Kitchen Operations while completing their Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). With three purpose-built learning sites, the Main Campus in Hightech Place Lilydale, a Community Farm in Monbulk and a Hangar at Coldstream Aerodrome, Ranges TEC provides authentic spaces where students can develop their God-given gifts and grow in the knowledge that God loves them and has a plan for them.

You can visit the Ranges TEC website for more details. www.ranges.tec.vic.edu.au

How do you cater for gifted students?

As can be seen from many other responses in this booklet MECS views all children as gifted, though this is probably not the kind of ‘gifted student’ being asked about here. Most people asking this question have a child who is a little ‘brighter’ academically than the average child. The question then becomes how MECS will keep my gifted child stimulated and challenged, not bored and disinterested because of a program that is pitched at the ‘middle’.

Broadly, we aim to help each child identify their gifts and provide programs that will encourage them to develop and excel in the use of their gifts. More specifically, the following can be noted:

- While we do not run a specific extension annex program, in some specific areas ‘advanced’ groups are possible: Advanced Maths classes commence at Year 7; Instrumental Music Tuition is available throughout; An elective choice program begins at Year 7 and the VCE years offer significant opportunity for gifted extension and expression.
- The curriculum program up until Year 9 is common to all students, except for specific alternate programs for those gifted in hands-on learning.
- Small class sizes and a close relationship between the class teacher and parents facilitate the opportunity for greater individual responses. That being said, we do not offer long-term individual learning programs.

Often ‘gifted’ students shine in some parts of the academic program, but not necessarily in all. If the school cannot find resources and programs to adequately develop a student’s gifts, parents might need to find programs outside of school that can supplement the MECS curriculum.
How do you motivate children to learn?

At each stage, from Kinder right through to Year 12, we encourage students to take increasing responsibility for their learning. We have in mind that as students mature, they can increasingly take charge of their learning task. We encourage them to become self-starters. It is also important for students to discover ways of learning that suit their gifts and abilities. MECS seeks to provide a wide range of learning experiences to assist students discover the ways they learn best. We have found that a student who can learn in a way that suits them is a motivated learner.

In our teaching, we help our students discover how to be motivated by the intrinsic worth or rewards associated with whatever particular activities or learning tasks they are engaged in. While at times it may be necessary for students to receive specific external rewards for the completion of a particular learning task or activity, we believe that such rewards should be used sparingly and wisely.

Why doesn’t MECS have a school uniform?

MECS does not have a compulsory uniform, but instead has a Guided Dress Policy. This does not mean ‘free dress’. In a country where school uniforms are fairly common particularly in independent schools, not having a school uniform is a strong statement. The discussion for and against a uniform is an endless one. There are many sound reasons both ways and neither case will ever win the argument. In the end, parents need to make their choices regarding enrolment based on their core values and key beliefs. Some parents at MECS would prefer that we did have a school uniform, but over time it becomes a ‘non-issue’ for them and certainly not one that would hold them back from partnering with MECS.

MECS believes that not having a uniform affirms each child’s uniqueness and encourages them to learn responsibility with their choice of clothing. All schools make choices that will lean towards either diversity or uniformity on a broad range of issues like dress, curriculum programs, assessment, class arrangements, and so on. Most schools prefer to make as many things standard or as uniform as possible because it makes things a lot easier to manage. MECS though, would rather err on the diversity side than the uniformity side where it is possible and reasonable. We recognise that in a communal setting, there has to be many ways in which there are uniform expectations for students. As such our ‘no uniform’ approach is not a plug for individualism. The school still has many common expectations for dress. All this being considered, MECS is not saying ‘uniforms are wrong’, but that we have sought to make choices that reflect the given diversity of creation. This approach isn’t always easy and can at times make things more difficult to manage.

We enforce the Guided Dress Policy in a graduated manner. Firstly, teachers check that students are complying. Students who are not are sent to the Dress Coordinator for ‘follow up’. Responses start at the ‘explanation and reminder’ level and move through warnings; DIN (Dress Infringement Notice); removal (and replacement) of offending items; detention; a specific ‘last warning’ letter home; and lastly, suspension from class.

The Parents and Friends (P&F) group sells a range of school wear items that students can use as dress options. These include the compulsory sport uniform items and optional T-shirts, windcheaters and dresses.

What is MECS’ approach to discipline?

Parents play the most important part in their child’s discipline, and the foundations of good discipline are laid in the home. MECS works with parents to support and reinforce the standards that are set at home, and in return, we expect parents to support our efforts at school. We tell parents about any concerns we have about their child’s conduct, and we invite parents to tell us about any stresses or changes their child is experiencing. This helps us treat their child in a sensitive manner.

Discipline builds character. Rules of behaviour are never an end in themselves, but a means of helping students move beyond grudging conformity to self-discipline. We teach students to respect one another. We want to help them grow into responsible members of our community, contributing to its harmony and wellbeing.

Misbehaviour has consequences. We have rules, for example, that protect other people, their property and our school. Sanctions apply when a student disregards these rules, and we try to apply these sanctions firmly and consistently. More importantly, we have high expectations for responsible and loving conduct by students. We are committed to working with students so they adopt these expectations as their personal standards. Imparting this type of discipline works best when it is demonstrated by example, and is accompanied by discussion and encouragement.

If punishment is required to help modify a student’s behaviour, we explain why such punishment is necessary and how it might be avoided in the future. If appropriate, the student will be asked to make sincere restitution and seek forgiveness and reconciliation with the person who has been harmed.

Our playgrounds are proof of the success of our approach. We rarely see displays of shouting, fighting and bad behaviour. Our goal of nurturing and encouraging mutual respect is more than just wishful thinking. It really works.
Distinctive creative all-of-life curriculum
What's distinctive about the MECS curriculum?

The distinctiveness of our curriculum can be summed up as follows:

It is biblically based and full of biblical perspective. It is Christ-centred, child-oriented and holistic. Throughout the curriculum teachers apply a transformational biblical worldview to the task of education. It fosters learning for appreciation, learning for understanding, and learning for service. Its goal is responsive discipleship.

It is a school based integral curriculum that is appropriately broad and deep (we describe what integral means in a separate answer). It enables cooperative and interdependent learning methodologies. It fosters diverse learning experiences in real life contexts. It seeks the wise and effective use of information resources, enabling students to access and analyse information, and engage in critical discernment.

Curriculum is not merely about what is taught, it is also about those who teach. Our teachers are committed to a biblically based faith and worldview. We assist our teachers to pursue ongoing professional learning in Christian education. Our teachers partner with parents for the education of their children. Our teachers are curriculum developers. Our teachers work as teams and with a collegiality amongst them in working toward our vision.

Our curriculum cultivates age-appropriate student self-responsibility for learning. It calls for students to engage in diverse age learning groupings. It seeks to be responsive to the individual needs of students, and develops the unique gifts of each student as an image bearer of God.

How is the MECS curriculum organised?

The MECS curriculum has been developed at school over many years and is very comprehensive. The overall organising principle is explained in the integral curriculum section.

In summary, the MECS curriculum (Prep – Year 10; Years 11 & 12 largely follow the VCE curriculum) can be divided into two parts: Core Studies and Skills. Core Studies (CS) is the largest part of the curriculum program and it focuses on a ‘chunk’ of life. In the MECS non-subject based curriculum, CS incorporates what in other schools fall under the social sciences and humanities umbrella. Being an integral model for curriculum, these topics include literacy, art and science connections. The integral approach facilitates the underpinning of a Christian perspective and a much easier development of a distinctive Christian curriculum. In the Middle School, the CS program takes about 60% of the program and is led by the class teacher.

The skills part of the curriculum covers the key learning areas that are essential for educational development and not specifically covered within the CS program, e.g., literacy or English, numeracy or Maths, Art, Science, PE, etc. A thorough audit against State based curriculum is conducted to ensure there are no gaps in the MECS curriculum.

More detailed explanations and outlines of each of the Primary, Middle and Senior School’s curriculum are given in the Handbook for each section.

What does integral curriculum mean?

Integral curriculum is in contrast with a traditional approach to school curriculum. Traditionally school curriculum is seen as consisting of a number of different, disconnected and unrelated subjects. In a sense, life is carved up into a number of different pieces or subject areas. Often each of these areas come to be seen as more important than any other. You can see evidence of this in the title of the textbook ‘Chemistry: The Key to the Earth’. The title implies that chemistry can explain everything! The fragmented subject curriculum of traditional schooling may make schooling a difficult and ‘unreal’ experience for many young people.

An integral curriculum starts from a completely different place. It begins by acknowledging that we always experience life as a whole before we ever experience particular subjects. We begin with our everyday experience and identify things that we don’t know or understand. We try to learn about these things in their real life complexity. We begin with and return to the ‘whole, concrete things’ that we experience in everyday life rather than the pieces that have been carved up to study as particular subjects in isolation from one another.

This does not mean we ignore the subjects you might expect to see in a traditional school. We draw upon them to help us understand the particular part of creation we are studying. The various subjects provide us with different approaches and methods for gaining a deeper and richer understanding and appreciation of creation. We also supplement our Core Studies program (the part of our curriculum which focuses on ‘concrete things’ and large areas of life) with the more traditional subjects such as maths, science, English, physical education, etc. to ensure that students develop the skills they need for further study in these areas at higher levels in the Secondary School.

Why do you have multi-aged classes?

Schools are the only places where people spend so much of their time living and working with people of their own age. It is much more common for people from a range of ages to work and live together. The benefits of maturity and experience come from older people, while younger people contribute energy, vision and insights. We believe that ‘multi-aging’ our classes provides particular educational and social benefits that are not provided in normal aged-linked classes. Multi-aged classes have students with a wider spectrum of abilities that can be used to enhance the personal, social and educational development of all children. At times, we group students of different ages and abilities together so that those with greater understanding or more developed skills can assist other students. Sometimes people assume that only the ‘weaker’ students benefit from this arrangement. However, if you have ever had to teach someone, you’ll have found out that one of the best ways of learning something is to teach it to someone else. Thus, the ‘stronger’ students become more adept and confident with their own learning, as well as benefiting from the experience of actually helping someone else. At other times, however, students with similar age and ability levels are grouped together so that
teachers can meet and provide for their particular needs. We also know that mixed arrangements bring social freshness. Students who begin with the one age group in Prep can stay with that same set of social dynamics for 13 years. It is better that they are mixed around over the years.

What are MECS' academic standards like?

As a school committed to seeing every student do their best, MECS strives to offer and deliver an academically robust program. Many factors will determine the results that a student achieves. If this interests you, please see the other questions that deal with students' gifts and excellence.

Even though results change from year to year, our students' outcomes in assessments such as VCE or NAPLAN show that MECS' approach produces strong results. The comparative advertised VCE and NAPLAN data reflects the fact that the MECS approach is rigorous and can 'match it' with all other local Secondary Schools, Independent or State. Compared with other independent education providers you should consider the following: MECS doesn't give scholarships to 'smart' kids; MECS supports all students (whatever their academic ability) if they want to get their Year 12 Certificate; and MECS includes all its students in its results.

It needs to be remembered that VCE results are just one measure of educational success. They are designed to determine suitability for tertiary course entrance. It is simply just one way of measuring learning.

Are you reluctant to advertise your VCE results because they are nothing to write home about?

Not at all. Besides, VCE results are available in the public domain through newspapers and the internet. The Federal Government also requires that we provide scholastic results for our community. You will find them in each year's Annual Report available from the office or on our website.

We have steadfastly resisted the trend to market VCE results as a measure of educational quality. Our reluctance to parade results has nothing to do with 'accountability' or that we might have something to hide. Rather, the results parade has become a marketing game that does not do any school credit. Statistics are manipulated and a level playing field just does not exist when it comes to VCE scores (refer to "What are the key determinants of student academic success?").

VCE results are merely one type of measure of student performance. Their main use is for entry to tertiary institutions. However, for the large proportion of students who do not plan on further study, the VCE does not provide a strong indication of their giftedness and nor should it be used to assess their success or failure. It is unfair to the students who have performed faithfully and are heading to work, apprenticeships or a non-university pathway, to be judged by a tertiary entrance score. At MECS, we want to celebrate the faithful work of these students as much as those who have gone on to doctorates.

MECS also has an 'in principle' objection to comparative assessment, where a child's educational worth is displayed as a mark against others. We see this as a harsh and potentially dangerous instrument. Insights into how a student is going should be broad; specific to the child; having a bias towards success; and focussed on proactive goals for future development. All this being said, we are still proud of our VCE results. Anyone who views these results will see that they compare very favourably with the 'highest' of local Independent and State comparisons.

I've been told the VCE is critical for my child's success in life. Is that correct?

There is a broad view in our society that schools are essentially preparing students for the VCE and that the Year 12 ATAR result determines a student’s life direction and potential success. This is largely a massive 'con'. There is a major trend in advertising VCE results which demonstrates just how seriously many take all this. Discerning parents query the validity of this tricky 'VCE results' game.

The main purpose of a VCE ATAR score is for university entry, but even for this purpose, there are doubts about its effectiveness. In an article in The Age in June 2008, the author notes that Higher Education critics insist that ATAR scores are a crude measure of suitability for tertiary study. She quotes Professor Greg Craven of the Australian Catholic University (ACU). He said, "At the moment universities select students in an impossibly crude way…We basically bring students in on the basis of a couple of numbers and we have no idea how they are even derived." Craven was speaking about the plan for ACU to introduce broader selection criteria for applicants.

While MECS is also critical of the view that the VCE is the 'be all and end all', it does not mean that we do not take the VCE seriously or make every attempt to maximise a student's result. In fact, the very opposite is the case and we do it with an all-of-life approach to your child’s education.
How does MECS support students to achieve their very best in the VCE?

The learning culture in the MECS Senior School should be quite clear for any visitor to see. The Senior School is a wonderful facility that seeks to be a relational, caring and robust context for learning. The VCE program is explained in the ‘Focus on Senior School’ Handbook. Please visit and talk to our Senior School staff. As you do so, you will discover their strength, specialisation and commitment.

Outside of these main support features MECS offers: Opportunity to undertake Unit 3 & 4 subjects in Year 11 (with guidelines); supervised Study Centre and compulsory study use of ‘study blocks’; two weeks of Year 12 orientation at the end of the Year 11 year; compulsory practice exams under exam conditions; an Exam preparation program; Year 12 Orientation & Study Camp; and VCE preparation skills workshops.

What are the key determinants of reported student academic success?

Schools can shape their reported academic success with three key factors: (1) Who is let in; (2) How are those who don’t make the grade treated; and, (3) How and what are they taught. Other factors like: teacher quality and skill; parent support; school resources; and school learning culture are all relevant but not as much as the three mentioned. MECS does not manipulate any of these three factors.

First, ‘who is let in’ or the school’s enrolment policy. Schools that fly the academic excellence flag, usually offer scholarships to ‘gifted’ kids. They use profiles and reports to determine selection, and they frequently try to stay clear of the ‘needy’ student. MECS does not offer scholarships for ‘smart students’, but rather we provide assistance to financially needy families. We enrol students based on committed partnership, so we get all types of students. That’s the reality of life in a diverse creation. Just like a parent doesn’t love one child more than another based on their gifts and abilities, nor does MECS give preference to academically gifted students.

Second, the treatment of students that struggle academically. Schools can control their average results by letting go of their poorly achieving students before they appear on their final list. Some of this is quite appropriate, as when a student commences an apprenticeship or finds a course they are better suited to, or even when a school asks them to leave because they are wasting their own time. However, schools that are not committed to the well being of an academically weak student can facilitate a student’s departure. At MECS, if a student is serious about finishing Year 12, we will stay committed to them. If that causes our VCE results to not look so great, so be it.

Third, ‘How and what is taught’. Many schools talk about academic excellence. MECS talks about a well rounded, holistic education. A school that is driven by ‘academic excellence’ as measured by VCE results, will seek to maximise those results. It is quite possible to teach merely for VCE success. Students may get great VCE results but many questions can be raised about depth and effective preparation for a freer thinking and unstructured university environment. VCE students who have been ‘spoon fed’ through the VCE process frequently do not have the individual robustness or skill set to manage in a very different learning context. By contrast, MECS graduates who attend university typically complete the course(s) of their choice.

Are there any other factors that shape results?

Parental attitude and support is a big factor in shaping results. This ‘parent’ part is very much up to you. Of course, teachers play an enormous role. MECS staff are committed to their faith, their teaching and the students they have. There’s a range of experience. Their qualifications can be found on our website. It’s difficult for us not to boast of our teachers, but it’s best to speak with other parents and ask them how they have found the MECS staff. If you are enquiring and would like to speak to some parents we’d be happy to put you in touch with some.

Resources contribute a great deal to student outcomes. MECS is generally well placed. Class sizes are consistently at the low end allowing for greater teacher attention. Facilities, general school educational resources and the ‘out-of-class’ learning experiences are outstanding. Computer technology access is good and is constantly being reviewed and upgraded. The school is medium in size, which can affect the number of subject offerings. There are times when secondary teachers teach outside their areas of expertise, and this can present both fresh insights and have its challenges.

What can you tell me about your graduates?

Graduates from our Senior School have entered universities and TAFE colleges. They have studied in a wide range of courses including accounting, agriculture, architecture, the arts, business and commerce, computing, engineering, horticulture, the humanities, medicine, science, social work, and teaching. Many of our students have also gained excellent apprenticeships or found significant work in all areas of the workforce.

Students proceeding to higher education have found that our Senior School has provided excellent preparation for the academic standard of tertiary study both in the degree of personal responsibility and in the motivation expected of students. We have observed they have high levels of degree completion – a sign that they are well prepared. Other students have left either at the end of Year 11 or 12 to train and serve as nurses, ministers, mechanics, retail managers, carpenters, builders and journalists, amongst many other vocations.

Our students who have left at the end of Year 11 have become real assets to their employers. For example, four ex-MECS students have become ‘Apprentice of the Year’.

All of these successes reflect the quality and excellence of the education these students have received at MECS yet such success reflects the prayerful support of the families these students come from, their faithful service, and the rich and wonderful blessing of God who makes all this possible.
How does MECS prepare students to be life-long learners?

In the first place, we model to students that they can learn and grow in understanding in any real life setting. A key aspect of their learning environment at school is the Library Resource Centre. Our focused use of the Library Resource Centre supports the process gaining information literacy. Information literacy is about students developing a commitment to wise, informed decision-making about the value and use of information. This is an important skill in view of the pervasive nature of the internet.

We also provide students with learning experiences within a problem-solving framework. That means they have real life problems to solve and as they do so, they gain skills to use throughout life. As part of their resource-based learning, we develop ever-deepening research and study skills from Kinder to Year 12.

We have seen that our graduates generally cope well with the less-structured atmosphere of tertiary level study because the self-discipline of research has been an ongoing part of their schooling. A further emphasis is placed on language improvement and enjoyment, and the promotion of voluntary reading through cooperatively developed programs.

Does a school’s learning culture shape student outcomes?

Learning cultures are complex things and are shaped by a school’s core goals and vision. You can get an idea of MECS’ holistic educational approach from the way it presents itself. Compare these pairs of contrastive phrases: exclusive or inclusive; hierarchical or relational; formal or informal; highly structured or more broadly structured; stiff or relaxed; same method or innovative; cerebral or ‘hands on’; informational or experiential; individual or cooperative; uniform or diverse; extrinsic or intrinsic; externally driven or self-driven; rigid or free; mainstream or alternative; prescriptive or descriptive; restrictive or allowing freedoms. In each pair, MECS leans more towards the latter. It has been a deliberate choice and will have its advantages and disadvantages. Some of these characteristics might mean that the achievement of higher academic standards is more difficult. A highly competitive and structured, rewards-based, spoon-fed, extrinsically motivated learning environment is a setting where it is easier to achieve higher exams results than one that has the opposite style. What parents need to weigh up is: Which has greater quality and character?

Will my child be able to get into the tertiary course they are striving for?

MECS offers all the subjects required for entry to every tertiary course in Victoria. If an ATAR is required as the doorway to a particular tertiary course, every effort is made to work alongside the student to achieve that outcome. That is quite possible in a competent smaller school. MECS students have achieved the very highest of academic courses, though every year there is a range of desires and outcomes. Students should seek helpful and realistic careers and training advice. This is available from the VCE and Careers Coordinators.

All of the partnership with you is vital. As a family, you should discuss with us the goals and aspirations of your child. We share the following example with you to illustrate this. The Barlow’s (not their real name) daughter was very bright and aiming for one of the top rungs on the Melbourne Uni list. They’d loved their MECS education, but around Year 9 they needed to ask, “Will our child make the score needed if they stayed?” It was a very difficult question. We believed that MECS would not compromise this young lady’s VCE outcome, but we also recognised that a larger, more competitive and selective environment would probably have made a few percentage points difference. Specific VCE oriented educational approaches are likely to make a small difference. In the end Ms Barlow stayed, achieved an outstanding result and went on to achieve the career path she’d chosen. In the end, the family chose on the basis of remaining settled and their commitment to the school, rather than a few points at the top end of the ATAR score.

Should we be concerned because there are limited VCE subjects and compulsory perspective subjects?

Our Senior School provides a broad and comprehensive range of VCE units. MECS offers all units that are prerequisites for any Victorian tertiary course.

Our Senior School Handbook outlines the range of subjects we offer. At times, people think that a smaller school cannot match it with a large secondary college. It is quite likely that a bigger school initially offers a wider range of subjects. What is frequently not explained when showing off the range of subjects is that many subjects are mutually exclusive, depending on the timetable. This means that even in a large school a student might not be able to undertake both Biology and Psychology because they are timetabled at the same time. MECS’ smallness allows for timetable flexibility and the opportunity to accommodate many individual choices. One area where a student may face some limits is in regard to subjects not required as tertiary course pre-requisites; where there are less than 5 students for these, we tend not to run classes.

It has always been a special feature of MECS that Senior School students are required to undertake a compulsory perspective subject. We provide a more academic option that contributes to the student’s VCE, as well as a less academically rigorous option that has fewer lessons and assessment requirements. The compulsory perspective subjects from Year 10 through to Year 12 are required because of the importance the school places on to assisting students to think, discern and critique from a faith-based perspective. You can know what that ‘perspective’ means by checking our explanation of our curriculum. We outline the compulsory perspective subjects in the current Senior School Handbook. The issue of compulsory perspective subjects may affect subject choice and you should discuss this with us if you think it will affect your child.
What language other than English do you study?

We take pride in having a unique learning environment at MECS when it comes to the promotion and teaching of an indigenous language. In fact, MECS may be unique in Victoria as the only non-aboriginal school to teach an indigenous language, Warlpiri. Warlpiri is a language spoken in Central Australia. All students in Year 10 study this indigenous language prior to a trip that takes them to stay in a Warlpiri community for several days in Central Australia.

Apart from its inherent value as a deeper introduction to the life and history of Australia's original inhabitants, this study has three core purposes. First, it’s the study of a complex language other than English. Second, it supports the investigation of culture as a force in human life. Third, it contributes to a student’s ability to empathise with a group central to our country and it gives insight into a major challenge of social justice.

Of course, when you asked the question, you may have been thinking about languages like French, Italian, Japanese or Mandarin Chinese. It is true that we do not have a Prep to Year 8 language program for languages such as these. It is our experience that such language learning programs apart from native speakers (away from real life contexts) are often ineffective. They possibly even ‘inoculate’ children against a genuine desire to acquire a language other than English. That is why our Warlpiri program makes sense – it is connected to real life.

One of the arguments often put forward regarding the learning of other languages is that they are a means of gaining cross-cultural sensitivity. In this area, we are very happy with the way we have embedded learning sensitivity to other cultures (especially to indigenous culture) at various points in our curriculum. Feel free to ask if you would like to know more in this area.

Why such a strong emphasis on camps?

Camps and other ‘out-of-classroom’ experiences are a priority at MECS because they result in excellent teaching and learning. They bring relevance. Their ‘hands on’ approach means that students can more easily apply their new knowledge in real life situations. Learning can be immediate and vital, and understanding achieved more quickly. The whole range of senses is engaged in this kind of learning; this brings a more complete understanding of a situation even for students who may not be strong in language skills.

Camps foster community; this results in participation and interaction for more effective learning. They encourage students to take on responsibilities not normally assumed at home and school. They lead students to pursue appropriate behaviour in new situations, be it public places, meeting other adults, or sharing a tent. Students discover that learning can occur throughout their lives.

What sort of sport options does MECS have?

There are three levels to our sports program. Firstly, the weekly, 2-period Physical Education program from Prep to Year 10. Secondly, the Tribal Sports program where students play in their ‘tribes’ with/against other tribes. At Senior Primary level, this is a weekly afternoon program. In the Secondary School, this occurs every term.

The third level is carnival and representative sports. MECS holds an internal swimming, cross-country and athletics carnival and these are followed by inter-school representative carnivals with pathways for further participation. Another avenue of inter-school secondary sport occurs through a once per term Rally Day (with different specific sports every term).

Separate to the specific, intentional sports and PE program, many class teachers work on student fitness. Every recess and lunch, the sports equipment store is open for students to borrow sports gear. School infrastructure planning has also made the provision of sporting grounds and facilities a priority. We have recently completed our primary multi-weather oval and our new gymnasium.

What sort of music options does MECS have?

We offer two main music programs, class based music instruction and the optional Instrumental Music program. The classroom based music in the Primary School and Year 7 has two periods per class with a specialist music teacher each week. In the Middle School (Years 7 – 9) students must choose two music electives (semester based topical music program) over their time within the Middle School. If sufficient students choose VCE music as an option, it may be able to offered it for study.

The Instrumental Music program is optional and open to all students. The Instrumental Music Coordinator facilitates arrangements between parents and the various Instrumental (including voice) Teachers. Teachers for a variety of instruments are available. Students who learn an instrument are expected to perform at least twice per year at school based instrumental recitals. Instruction occurs at lunch, after school and during normal class lessons (on a rotating-period basis, so that the same lesson is not consistently missed). Students involved in instrumental music are also encouraged to join a band in school. Those learning to sing are encouraged to join a choir.
Can we be confident that our child’s education will be comprehensive?

In the first place, your confidence can be found in the fact that we are establishing an education partnership with you. You can also be confident because we have over 40 years experience in providing Christian education. Many parents have found us to be trustworthy in this regard. In fact, in all our experience we have never observed our students to have had any disadvantage in terms of future options for post-schooling study or work. You can be confident because MECS is fully accredited by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. This means we have to demonstrate that our curriculum satisfies generally accepted educational standards. Of course, the basics are taught, but we will take your child into learning experiences far beyond the basics.

Even though we have a school-based curriculum, we also draw on a range of government and commercial educational resources as we develop and review our own curriculum. We also check our curriculum against the Australian Curriculum, VELS (Victorian Essential Learning Standards), the State curriculum standards to see if there are areas we need to include in our own curriculum. In the Senior School, our Year 11 and 12 students study the State-mandated VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education), and some enrol in VET (Vocational Education and Training) programs. We have also adopted a number of programs and use a range of commercially produced textbooks that we consider to best align with our own curriculum and educational approach.

Do you teach creation or evolution?

The short answer to this question is that we teach about both. The first and most important point is that, fundamentally our Christian worldview is the belief that the whole universe – all that exists – was created and is maintained by God. Consequently, our Christian worldview is creationist as opposed to the naturalist or materialist worldview of secular humanism. We speak of ‘creation’ rather than ‘nature’, because these very words reflect particular worldview beliefs about the origin and character of life and the universe. To speak of ‘creation’ of course implies a belief in a Creator who made all things and governs all things through His Word and law. To speak of ‘nature’ may imply that the universe ‘just is’, that there is no divine Creator and that things came to be and exist simply through the combined forces of natural laws and processes of time, space and chance. This is the fundamental difference between a Christian and secular worldview.

So what about evolution, you ask. Well, particularly in the Senior Secondary years we do teach about evolution. Firstly, just as we teach many things in our curriculum that are important for our students to know in order to understand our world and the beliefs that influence our lives and society generally, we teach them about evolution via natural selection. We teach them the main features of, and the evidence for, the theory of evolution as held by most scientists today. We also introduce the students to the criticisms of the theory of evolution that are made by a wide variety of scientists and philosophers. We introduce the students to alternative theories such as Intelligent Design. We discuss with the students why many scientists, including some Christian scientists, reject these alternative theories and why (and how) some Christian scientists believe that some aspects of evolutionary theory can be reconciled with the Bible. We also discuss with the students whether these are strictly scientific debates or whether they are philosophical, worldview or religious debates. Our hope is not that students will adopt a particular, ‘approved line’ (one particular Christian view), but that, especially for those going on to study science or science-related courses at university, they will have a sound understanding of the theory of evolution and can articulate problems with the theory that have been identified, and that they can begin to formulate their own response to these issues. The last thing we want is for students to leave MECS with a view that is unable to deal with or withstand criticisms that might be thrown at them at university.

What’s your approach to fantasy and material of a sexual and violent nature?

In relation to challenging or sensitive issues within the Christian community (including other religions, literature content, film and media content, music, dramatic performances, sexuality, violence, evolutionary theory, moral issues, and so on), MECS has a policy of ‘guided exposure’.

The idea of guided exposure means we are very careful in the way in which we deal with these things. We do not merely shield students from sensitive issues, but seek to develop discerning hearts and minds. Thus, teachers will introduce issues to students in a manner appropriate to their age, and with biblical perspective and appropriate critique.

As a way of illustrating this, we might consider the Harry Potter books and films. Do we simply tell children not to read and view these? For young children this will be our stance. For slightly older children our teachers will engage with the issues involved. Some of the questions might include: Are these stories about witchcraft? What is fantasy literature? What values are in the story that run counter to the gospel? Just because a book is popular does that make it good literature? We can ask similar questions of other literature that appears to be innocuous but also contains ideas and values that are counter-biblical.

Of course when parents desire greater control of the exposure of their children to certain issues, our partnership with them means that MECS respects and supports their wishes.
Community
vibrant learning
environment
How do you organise Kindergarten to Year 12 in the one school?

MECS has Kindergarten to Year 12 on the one property, and each section of the school – Kindergarten, Primary, Middle, and Senior School has its own space. This allows for a smooth transition as a student grows and moves into the next level.

Within the Primary and Middle Schools, we have multi-age classes (refer to the question about multi-age classes on page 24 for further details). Prep to Year 2 are organised as Junior Primary, Years 3 and 4 are Middle Primary, and Years 5 and 6 are Senior Primary. In the Middle School Years 7 & 8 are organised in multi-age classes and Year 9 is a stand alone program.

There are a wide range of opportunities to build relationships right across the student community. We have whole school gatherings regularly and each of the sections gather weekly or fortnightly. Year 11 and 12 students at times assist with Junior Primary students. Prep students have a Year 6 and a Year 12 buddy. Middle School students at times help with Primary School sports. Not only do these enhance learning, they foster an attitude of service and contribute to the tangible sense of community we have. One very special experience focuses on our Year 12 students when they graduate. At this time Prep students will make a special farewell card for their Year 12 friend – it creates a ‘bookend’ kind of experience in the community.

Please describe the character and style of the Kindergarten.

The MECS Kindergarten opened in 2013 - an exciting extension of Christian education for young children. The Kindergarten is a special place to begin formal education where young children feel safe, secure, respected and loved by others.

The ‘early years’ area of MECS incorporates both Playgroup and 3 and 4 year old kindergarten, with programs that are full of opportunities for learning through exploration and discovery, within a relaxed and unhurried atmosphere, where immersion in projects and play experiences occur. In the 4 year old Kindergarten program, children are gradually and gently prepared for school - the proximity of the kindergarten to the Prep and Junior Primary areas facilitate lovely opportunities for transition. Children will feel like a part of the MECS community from the very beginning.

Please describe the character and style of the Primary School.

The Primary School (PS) is situated at the lower end of the school grounds (closest to York Road). It has 11 classes grouped around a model of 2 Prep classes, and triple (or clustered) classes of Junior Primary (Years 1 & 2), Middle Primary (Years 3 & 4) and Senior Primary (Years 5 & 6). These triple classes are located together to enable the three class teachers to work closely within a teamwork and cooperative learning model.

The key curriculum focus is on foundational learning in Literacy, Numeracy and Core Studies. Each morning block is given to Literacy and after recess to Numeracy. Specialist teachers work in Library and Information Literacy, PE and Music, while Art is undertaken by the class teacher. The Primary playground has three main areas: the garden area in front of their Prep/JP classrooms (for Prep to Year 2 only); the main quadrangle (for all); and the Primary oval and playground (for all).

The size of the Primary School at maximum is 270 students. Prep classes ideally would be 18 students, incrementally rising to a maximum of 28 in Senior Primary. The smallness and close community of the Primary School means every class teacher knows the names of all students in their cluster and oftentimes most primary students.

There is a strong history of parent involvement in the Primary School. Parents mainly help in the classroom but there is opportunity for a wide range of other involvement. MECS really appreciates a close relationship with Primary parents.

Please describe the character and style of the Middle School.

The Middle School is situated to the south of the Primary School, behind the school office. It incorporates Years 7-9 with approximately 180 students. Class sizes are deliberately structured around 21 students, with each class having their own class teacher and classroom, and each student having their own desk space and internal locker. The class teacher teaches approximately 60% of the curriculum for their class (mostly core studies). Classes are designed to be homely, comfortable and effective of the work and character of the group. The communal, relational/pastoral atmosphere of the Middle School is very different to most mainstream junior secondary schools.

The Year 7 & 8 curriculum follows a 60% Core Studies/ 40% Skills (more traditional subject based studies) arrangement. In 2011, the completion of a new Year 9 centre as part of the refurbishment of the Middle School, worked in conjunction with a decision to develop a ‘stand-alone’ Year 9 program: the Open Village. Year 9 now undertakes an innovative approach to middle adolescent education, designed to enable them to take more responsibility for their work practices. Students are involved in negotiating their own suitable assessment tasks with teachers, and have more opportunities for self-directed learning.

There is a specific orientation program for Year 7 students new to MECS to assist them in understanding the MS culture and to help them adjust.
Throughout the MS years, parents continue to have a close relationship with their child’s class teacher. While not assisting in the classroom, they will have the opportunity to be involved in other ways, and can provide great assistance on camps. A more detailed account of what happens in the Middle School can be found in the Middle School Handbook.

Please describe the character and style of the Senior School

The Senior School (SS) is situated at the top end of the school approximately 200 metres up from the main office. Access is provided via internal school pathways, or via a second driveway on Hawkins Road (300 metres south from the first driveway). The SS facilities are grouped around a central courtyard. The SS office can be found within this precinct. Students have access to specialist areas for PE, and Careers as well as having a dedicated Study Centre, Computer Lab and Theatrette. Specialist Art, Manual Arts, Science and Library are accessed by a short walk down the hill. It has its own canteen that operates each day. The buildings and facilities of the SS are designed to reflect the holistic character of MECS education, and are arranged for inclusion and community, not separation. SS staff are not separated into subject/faculty areas but work together in the one central staffroom. Students are welcome to have respectful access to teachers within the staffroom. The friendly and close relationship between teachers and students is reflective of the warm, relational approach in the SS.

The Senior School encompasses students in Years 10 – 12, with Year 10 being a bridging year between Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary. Year 10 students have a curriculum program designed between the MS model and the VCE. Many Year 10 students undertake a VET (Vocational Education Training) subjects are offered across the Yarra Valley VET Cluster; 16 different subjects at various venues) subject on Wednesdays; some commence a VCE Unit 1&2 subject; and students are introduced to Study Blocks (supervised and unsupervised ‘self’ study periods in the Study Centre). Students undertake 15 periods of English and Core Studies with the one Year 10 class and Year 10 teacher. Specialist teachers deliver the rest of the Year 10 curriculum. Year 10 students also arrange for two weeks of work experience.

The Year 11 and 12 program is largely shaped by the VCE. A Student and Parent Information Night is held in August, where the Senior School Handbook is distributed. This Handbook explains all the necessary details for making subject choices as well as addressing all relevant issues. Students are required to undertake compulsory perspective subjects. This is further explained in the curriculum area of this booklet (see page 28). The compulsory weekly SS assembly is a key gathering for all students. Daily home groups mark the roll, as well as distributing ‘house keeping’ details and spending time in devotional reflection. A more detailed account of what happens in the Senior School can be found in the Senior School Handbook.

How does MECS ensure my child isn’t overlooked in a system?

If your child joins us, they will soon have a sense of belonging. Our staff will not overlook them and they will not be lost in the throng. We can confidently assure you of that because we have been doing this successfully for over three decades. The ways we achieve this are by maintaining small class sizes and by ensuring that teachers are the primary source of pastoral care for students. Remember that in our approach to education we view each child as a special individual created in God’s image. This is not just rhetoric; we live it.

What are the advantages of your small classes?

Our view is that limiting class size is vital because the class (whether inside a room or outdoors) is the primary place of learning, discipleship, nurture and pastoral care. For us, the ability to form effective teaching/learning relationships between the teacher and students is of paramount importance. Class size has a direct bearing on such relationships. When the teacher knows each student’s unique skills, gifting, and struggles they can focus the teaching, discipleship and care that takes place.

What is your approach to bullying and how do you handle it if it occurs?

Concern and responsibility for the safety and well-being of all students is of prime importance. The image of God as Father, the supreme ‘care-giver’, establishes the foundation that MECS is a community where teachers and parents work together in partnership to establish a safe and supportive environment for all students. As a result, MECS is committed to providing an environment where students are free from any form of harassment, bullying and exposure to harm and where children are encouraged to develop into self-disciplined young people. We identify students at risk and ensure appropriate measures are made available to address their needs. We encourage an attitude of positive self-esteem and self-worth through the knowledge that God has created each child with unique contributions and gifts. We ensure that appreciation is fostered through ‘who one is’ rather than ‘what one can do’.

Bullying is identified as students exhibiting the following behaviours towards their peers or other members of the student body: exclusion; teasing; harassment (sexual/physical); discrimination (appearance, ability, race, gender, Christian ethos); and intimidation. Apart from teachers being vigilant regarding overt and covert behaviour and students or parents informing teachers, students have the opportunity to express their concerns through a Bullying Survey. If we identify bullying, procedures that involve the parents are established for the elimination of bullying, and there are on-going support counselling sessions with the student/s.
What kind of rapport do you encourage between teachers and students?

Terms such as respect, care, esteem and value describe the kind of relationship we desire between teachers and students. We encourage our teachers to be aware of the personal background and individual needs of their students. We foster cooperative relationships between students and teachers. It is much more common in secondary schools for there to be an ‘us and them’, adversarial relationship between students and teachers. We work hard to avoid this and feel we are doing fairly well at facilitating the kind of relationships that help effective learning.

You have two sets of 3-week holidays through the year. Do MECS students have less school days?

The MECS calendar for the each year is published approximately 6 months earlier and is available on the website. It is built on a model of no less than 182 school days (for Kindergarten – Year 9; more for Years 10 – 12); four week-long workbreaks (the MECS name for weeks where teachers attend and students do not) at the commencement of each term and full school weeks with the exception of public holidays.

This number of student school days is quite similar to most Independent schools, and slightly less than State schools. However, with curriculum and reporting days (4 government provided days plus 2 days if applied for) scattered through the year and the way in which the last two weeks of the school year are run at most State Secondary schools, there is not a great deal of difference in actual ‘teaching’ days between MECS and State Secondary schools. For Primary schools, it will depend on how those last two weeks are run.

The exception to the 182 days is for Senior School students, who have extra requirements. Year 12 students have learning intensives, study camp and exam week requirements; Year 10 and 11s have work experience; and Year 10 students have their Centre Trip. These all occur during workbreaks. The finish date for Years 10 – 12 also differs as this is determined by the VCE exam timetable. The specific number of school days for Years 10 – 12 differs for each year level and can be calculated by checking against the school calendar.

MECS teachers start the year earlier and have one week less holidays overall, as a part of the workbreak arrangement. The school has always benefited wonderfully from these four workbreak weeks. They have enabled our teachers to pursue the development of Christian education and to support our school-based curriculum.

Can I inspect your grounds and facilities?

Yes, please come for a visit to explore MECS. We are sure that when you do our wonderful learning environment will surprise you. What you will experience is the result of careful planning with creative designs, though we have worked hard at not being extravagant. Beyond the classrooms and offices, our built facilities include the library resource centre, the science centre, the media centre, the senior school study centre, the theatrette, the manual arts complex, a multi-purpose primary school space, three staff rooms, and a community room. All of these fantastic facilities and heaps of playground space are found in our lovely bushy tree setting, which is something we prize and guard carefully. We believe that you’ll agree with us that the result is quite beautiful. It certainly makes it easier for us as an educational community to be more aware of our natural environment and care for it.

Do you have school buses?

MECS has several buses that transport children to and from a number of areas. We are dependent on parents to act as drivers for these routes. Drivers are paid for their services. Being a minibus driver is a great way to serve the MECS community. We also use charter buses for certain routes.

Each year we revise our bus routes to meet the changing needs of MECS families. As far as possible, the bus services aim to assist families travelling significant distances. Given the increasing demand, we also give preference to full-time users. Forms to apply for bus seat allocation are sent to families of newly enrolled students in their orientation pack after they enrol.

MECS Mini-Buses and Buses – serve areas to the south and west of MECS, and the Yarra Glen/Healesville area. There are also other bus services that can cater for student transport:

- Billanook Bus – Private Bus – From Mt Evelyn to Belgrave
- Martyrs Bus – Warburton – Wandin – Clegg Road – MECS
- Invicta Bus: – Ringwood Station via Canterbury Rd – Bus No. 670
- – Ringwood Station via Chirnside Park – Bus No. 679
- – Lilydale Station via Swansea Road – Bus No. 4

Current bus route details are available from the school office. Apart from buses, many of our families also organise car pools with other parents from their area.

See MECS Website for more information.