What’s up with class sizes?

Over the last few years there has been a lot of discussion around class sizes and how it impacts learning. The long held belief amongst parents and teachers is that small class size equals good learning outcomes for every student. At MECS we too have promoted small classes in order to provide quality learning, and as a means of giving students priority attention for their learning and pastoral needs.

However, the understanding is changing about what makes an effective learning environment, driven significantly by the research results of Dr John Hattie who is the Director of Melbourne Research Institute at the University of Melbourne. You may have read or heard about his work in the media. His research has systematically and carefully delved into what really matters in education and what really makes the difference, using evidence produced from 113 studies conducted in developed nations – including UK, Australia, US and Europe, over the last 25 years. This was an unprecedented analysis of effective education, and the results are surprising.

(TED talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzwJXUieD0U)

Hattie’s research shows that class size has very little impact on a child’s quality of education, because teachers tend to stick to their teaching approach regardless of the number of students. Professor Hattie said lowering class sizes “does increase achievement but the effect is very small”.

Far higher impact was the expertise of the teacher, and the relationship between teacher and student.

In his paper, entitled, “What Doesn’t Work in Education: The Politics of Distraction”, Professor Hattie wrote: “Reducing class sizes is an innovation that certainly appeases parents, teachers and school leaders. Parents see reducing class size as a proxy to more attention being paid to their children.

“School leaders see it as a proxy for more resources... and teachers argue it is less stressful and more effective to deal with fewer students.”

He added: “(But) the change is small because teachers don’t change their teaching when the size changes.”

Separately, Professor Hattie’s research
also found that the classroom a student is assigned to within a school matters more than the school itself. “For two kids of the same ability it almost doesn’t matter which school they go to, but it matters who teaches them....The choice is not either about large or small classes, or whether it is an academy or not. Instead, parents should be comparing class size with teachers’ expertise.”

You may be interested in the following article by Javier Espinoza, Education Editor


So what does this mean for MECS as we look at growth over the next few years? Our parent community is aware of the challenges we are facing as the demand for places at MECS exceeds our desired class sizes, and that this has resulted in some relatively larger class sizes in some areas of the school.

We want to share our wonderful school. We want to be able to offer Christian education to those who are passionately seeking it, and we believe that is what God wants us to do. Expanding our Primary School is not a decision we make lightly, or one that can be implemented quickly.

While we transition to a larger primary school, we want to assure you that we are committed to ensuring we have quality teachers with high level expertise. We are committed to ensuring pastoral care is not diminished by providing Learning Assistants to work with teachers in larger classes. We are committed to the best teaching and learning programs available.

This is an exciting time! We would love you, our parent community, to join us in inviting others to Christian education at MECS. We ask you to join us in trusting God on this venture and pray that he will lavishly bless this development.

We ask God that he will care for the individual needs of every little life and every family, and that no child’s needs would go unnoticed. We know your children are precious and that you want the very best for their education. So do we! Our prayer is that we will do this well and that in our partnership with you, each child will have the opportunities they need to grow and flourish on their educational journey.