



Focus on Identity

Mount Evelyn Christian School



Mount Evelyn Christian School 135 York Road Mount Evelyn VIC 3796 ABN 19 775 686 269
T: (03) 9738 6000 F: (03) 9738 6001 office@mecs.vic.edu.au www.mecs.vic.edu.au

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

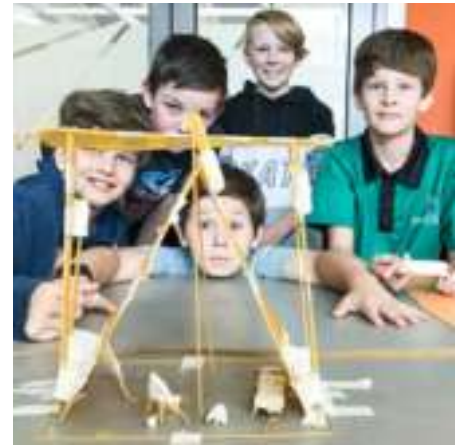
The material here is not meant to be read like a book from start to finish. Rather, we've designed it for you to go to those questions that most interest you. You may find the checklist on the next page a helpful way to keep track of what you have covered. Start with the questions that most interest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

If you have any further questions, we would love to chat to you!



Contents

1. Direction – a transforming biblical perspective	4
<input type="checkbox"/> How did MECS begin?	5
<input type="checkbox"/> Why a Christian school?	5
<input type="checkbox"/> What is a Christian school?	5
<input type="checkbox"/> How does faith touch every area of school life?	5
<input type="checkbox"/> What does 'Equipping for Life' mean?	6
<input type="checkbox"/> What are 'Christian perspectives'?	6
<input type="checkbox"/> Who is the regulatory authority for MECS?	6
2. Partnership – genuine connection between home and school	7
<input type="checkbox"/> Why is there a strong emphasis on parent-partnership at MECS?	8
<input type="checkbox"/> Why is MECS a parent-governed Christian school?	8
<input type="checkbox"/> Who owns the school?	8
<input type="checkbox"/> Can you tell me about Association membership?	8
<input type="checkbox"/> What are the opportunities for involvement by parents?	8
<input type="checkbox"/> What should I know about school fees?	9
<input type="checkbox"/> What are the school's criteria for enrolment eligibility?	9
<input type="checkbox"/> What is the Partnership Agreement?	10
<input type="checkbox"/> What are the 'Parent Seminars' referred to in the Partnership Agreement?	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Why is it beneficial for all of our school-aged children to attend MECS?	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Do we have to go to church to apply for enrolment?	10
<input type="checkbox"/> What if my child is not a Christian?	11
<input type="checkbox"/> How much religion or 'God talk' occurs at MECS?	11
3. Discipleship – life equipped to make a difference	12
<input type="checkbox"/> You say your goal for students is discipleship. What does that mean?	13
<input type="checkbox"/> How will you encourage my child to grow in faith?	13
<input type="checkbox"/> Does the school specifically seek to grow Christian character?	13
<input type="checkbox"/> How do you help students to understand and critique the confusing and challenging world in which they live?	13
<input type="checkbox"/> How will sending my child to MECS make a difference?	13
<input type="checkbox"/> How will MECS value my child?	13
<input type="checkbox"/> What sort of pastoral care do you provide?	14
<input type="checkbox"/> How do you motivate children to learn?	14
<input type="checkbox"/> Why doesn't MECS have a school uniform?	14
<input type="checkbox"/> What is MECS' approach to discipline?	15
4. Distinctive – creative all-of-life curriculum	16
<input type="checkbox"/> What's distinctive about the MECS curriculum?	17
<input type="checkbox"/> What is integral curriculum?	17
<input type="checkbox"/> Why do you have multi-aged classes?	17
<input type="checkbox"/> What are MECS' academic standards?	17
<input type="checkbox"/> What can you tell me about your graduates?	18
<input type="checkbox"/> Will my child be able to get into the tertiary course they are striving for?	18
<input type="checkbox"/> What language other than English do you study?	18
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you teach creation or evolution?	18
<input type="checkbox"/> What's your approach to teaching sensitive issues?	18
5. Community – vibrant learning environment	20
<input type="checkbox"/> How does MECS ensure my child is cared for?	21
<input type="checkbox"/> What is your approach to bullying and how do you handle it if it occurs?	21
<input type="checkbox"/> What's your view on issues to do with sexuality, gender and marriage equality?	21
<input type="checkbox"/> You have two sets of 3-week holidays through the year. Do MECS students have less school days?	21
<input type="checkbox"/> What kind of rapport do you encourage between teachers and students?	23



Direction
a transforming
biblical perspective

How did MECS begin?

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 years 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 child's 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 seek to know 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 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 is a view of the material world in which one needs to work; two very different views about education.

What is a Christian school?

While 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. Such a 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.

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 is 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 forefathers 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.





What does 'Equipping for Life' mean?

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.

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 to encourage 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.

What is a 'Christian perspective'?

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.

Who is the regulatory authority for MECS?

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 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 is there a strong emphasis on parent partnership at MECS?

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 does not mean parents will not 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, although 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. Firstly, it's the attitude you bring, secondly it's assisting your child, and thirdly 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 Friends of MECS group (fundraising and community activities), pay fees on time, attend concerts and events involving your child, read newsletters and, of course, interact with teachers.



What should I know about 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 website for the latest information (www.mecs.vic.edu.au).

Fees are billed at the start of each year. All fees are to be paid in full by November 30 of that year, with approximately 25% due by the end of each term. Direct debit is our preferred method of payment; debits can be made monthly, per term, per semester or annually. Fees can also be paid via direct deposit (internet transfer), cash, cheque or EFTPOS/credit card (in person).

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 attracts a 25% discount, 3rd child get a 40% discount. There is also 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.)

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. Arrangements here are within Board guidelines. They involve a confidential financial questionnaire and an interview with the Administration Manager and/or Principal.

The school fee is an all-inclusive figure. It covers 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).

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

- **School wear** – MECS has a compulsory sports top which must be purchased from Year 3. Optional items of other schoolwear are also available.
- **Stationery** is an additional annual expense. In Term 3 of each year, the stationery requirements list will be sent out to families for the following year. Parents are able to use the preferred supplier of the school, or source the items themselves. Items that require special order and are not available at usual stationery suppliers will be provided by the school, and charged to parents' accounts.
- **Textbooks** – Middle School students usually only require a few textbooks, while more will be required by Senior School students.
- **VETiS costs** - In Years 10 & 11, students have the option to choose a vocational training subject. The tuition fees for this subject is substantially subsidised by MECS, but there are also material costs involved.



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 the Enrolments Manager 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 second preceding year (i.e. 2 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.

What is the 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 two '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 is it beneficial for all of our school-aged children to attend MECS?

MECS wants a partnership with the whole family. That means we believe it is 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'.

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 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, priority is given to Christian families, and 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.





How much religion or 'God talk' occurs at MECS?

We believe that all of life is connected to the God who creates, sustains and redeems it. Therefore, God permeates our thinking, teaching and learning, like yeast in bread. Yet this does not mean we are 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 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.

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 do not 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.

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 is 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), although 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 is not given to Christian students. Correct 'Christian' information does not 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 is not 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.



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?

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?

It is important to us to see our young people grow in maturity and character. It is also important to us to understand 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 does not 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 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. Therefore, 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 will 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. Therefore, 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 motivate children to learn?

At each stage, from Kindergarten 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 in discovering 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.

And, we're committed to making classes interesting, engaging, surprising and fun!

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 choice 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 and guide students in good decision making in what they choose to wear.





What is MECS' approach to discipline?

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. MECS approach to discipline follows the principles of Restorative Practice which recognises and helps students understand that relationships are damaged when behaviour goes wrong, or poor choices are made. MECS students are learning to respect themselves and others - their fellow students, teachers and parents. Students learn to take responsibility for their actions and understand that there are consequences for behaviour. This approach acknowledges each person's perspective, helps to build relationships and helps students work towards restoring the problem. Students learn that issues and problems can be worked through resulting in forgiveness, healing and restoration. We believe that this process is in line with a Christian perspective - we forgive each other as God forgives us. We seek restoration of relationships, as God does with us.

Each discipline incident is approached by having a 'Restorative Chat' addressing four main questions:

1. **What is the problem?** We help students identify what went wrong, and understand that the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem.
2. **Who is affected?** Who was hurt by these actions? How were they hurt?
3. **How can we fix the problem?** We assist students to see the need for an apology and for them to put right the relationship and things that have gone wrong. They identify that the relationship and trust has been damaged.
4. **How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?** We help students identify why it happened and what underpinned the action that caused the problem. Consequences appropriately applied help the student consolidate their understanding and set right the broken relationship.

Restorative Discipline works hand in hand with the development of social skills and community building.

MECS staff recognise that all behaviour has a reason, and always seek to identify the reasons behind why a student is acting as they are. Staff explore with the student what has happened and why it has happened.

An important part of the restorative process is to identify ways that the relationship or situation can be restored. Students take part in forming the consequences for themselves, with guidance where necessary. This helps them learn the results and impact of their choices, and significantly, how to make amends. A bad choice is not the end - the restoration is, allowing all affected parties to move on and put the incident behind them.

We believe that an important element of our partnership with parents is to keep them informed of behavioural issues with their child. Parents support the school and the school supports parents by working together when there are problems. A timely phone call, email or meeting for serious incidents, keeps parents in the loop and ensures that students know that all the adults in their lives are working toward their growth and wellbeing.





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 curriculum that is appropriately broad and deep. 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.

What is integral curriculum?

An integral curriculum begins by acknowledging that "In Christ, all things hold together" (Col 1:17). We 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.

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 Foundation could otherwise potentially 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?

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.

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 does not give scholarships to 'smart' students; MECS does not set entrance tests for enrolment; MECS supports all students (whatever their academic ability); and MECS includes all its students in its results.

It needs to be remembered that VCE results are just one measure of educational success. ATAR scores are designed to determine suitability for tertiary course entrance. It is simply one way of measuring learning. We have steadfastly resisted the trend to market VCE results as a measure of educational quality. 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.



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.

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. MECS students have achieved the very highest of academic courses, although every year there is a range of desires and outcomes. Students should seek helpful careers and training advice. This is available from the VCE and Careers Coordinators.

What language other than English do you study?

MECS teaches Indonesian studies throughout the Primary school, and currently up to Year 8. Students engage with the Indonesian language and culture through songs, story telling, role-playing and games. They learn through hands-on engagement with authentic materials and cultural artefacts, including shadow puppets and batik-fabric making. Student curiosity shapes part of the curriculum, allowing students to explore areas of interest to them in Indonesia, including traditional dance, sports and Indonesian animals. We believe it is valuable for our students to learn about our close neighbours and how to be welcoming, empathetic and hospitable to those of different cultures and languages. Language learning not only supports students in their literacy skills, it encourages students to engage with other cultures with curiosity, confidence and respect.

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 is your approach to teaching sensitive issues?

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 does MECS ensure my child is cared for?

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 system. 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 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. Teachers are vigilant regarding the identification of overt and covert behaviour and we also rely on students or parents informing teachers. 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.

We respond promptly to parent concerns and foster open conversations with students about what is going on. 'Bullying' results when less significant events are not addressed early on. We are committed to responding the 'small' issues so they do not develop into the 'big' issues.

What's your view on issues to do with sexuality, gender and marriage equality?

There is a broad range of views within the Christian church, and broader society in relation to these matters. However, at the heart of MECS is our desire to care for each individual student and journey with them as they grow into the young men and women that God desires. This is our priority as a school who believes that each child is created in the image of God.

We encourage respectful and informed discussions around these issues, and actively work to make the school a safe place for every student.

MECS recently revised its policy on Sex Education and related matters. Part of this policy is that staff will ensure that discussion on sex and sexually related matters will be conducted respectfully and sensitively, recognising that not all Christians agree about these matters. A traditional understanding of biblical principles for this area of life will be presented, as well as an acknowledgement of different understandings amongst Christians and respected theologians. Appropriate consideration of age and maturity will also be taken into account.

In regard to enrolment, our school does not discriminate in regard to sexuality and gender.

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

The extra holiday weeks are what we call 'Workbreak' weeks, where staff attend but students do not. MECS has up to 4 such weeks each year, attached to the school holiday blocks. These workbreak weeks are essential for our staff to create and implement Christian education and to support our school-based curriculum.

The MECS calendar is built on a model of no fewer than 182 school days (for Kindergarten – Year 9; more for Years 10 – 12) which is quite similar to most Independent schools, and slightly fewer than State schools. 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; Years 10 and 11 students have work experience; and Year 10 students have their trip to central Australia. The finish date for Years 10 – 12 also differs as this is determined by the VCE examination 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.





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.

We hope this information has answered your questions. I would love to chat to you and show you around MECS. Please contact me to set up a time to see MECS in action. bmatthews@mecs.vic.edu.au

Bethany Matthews
Enrolment Manager





15/12/2021

Mount Evelyn Christian School
135 York Road Mount Evelyn 3796
office@mecs.vic.edu.au
www.mecs.vic.edu.au
03 9738 6000