

Advisory Council Report 2019

As I sit down to write this report, I am reflective on those first days 90 years ago. How delighted those Sisters would be to know that what they began then, and all the hardships they faced, were worthwhile, and the vision of Mother Brigid Watson, parents, students and staff who worked so hard to create the College has been so successful and enjoyed in 2019. Congratulations and thanks to Mrs Carmen Cox, our Principal, and all her staff, both teaching and non- teaching, who together have worked hard to celebrate this, the 90th year of St Brigid's College. They have also made sure that the spirit of care and excellence begun all those years ago will never be eradicated.

Then I reflect further on questions before this community today.

What does it mean for the St Brigid's College Community to be a Mercy School in our time?

What does it mean to be a member of the Advisory Council of St Brigid's College in this its 90th Year?

What does it mean to be a member of St Brigid's College Community in this time and place?

How are we facing our developing future?

Sister Kathleen Williams, a member of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea in 1988 answers our questions in this way - "I understand it means to belong to a group of people who experience sinfulness, pain, facing doubt, weakness and sickness etc. in themselves. But they also experience forgiveness, relief, renewed strength, hope, trust, belief and healing."

And 21 years later, the Advisory Council still has this underlying principle and question deep in their thoughts at each meeting. What does it mean to be a member of the Advisory Council of a Mercy Values School?

In July this year, the four Bishops of Western Australia announced their decision to Incorporate Catholic Education in WA. This decision was not taken lightly and had been put to them by an Independent Advisory Committee as an important move and safe-guard for Catholic Education. The reason for this decision was, and is, the sustainability of Catholic Education in our State, and to ensure that any change of governance will have minimal impact on the operations of Catholic schools in WA, and therefore, for the community of St Brigid's College.

The Advisory Council understands that St Brigid's is answerable to two companies, Mercy Education Limited or (MEL) and Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA Limited). We are certainly in strong hands. This means little change in day-to- day operations, although it does seem at times to be an additional layer of reporting for the Leadership.

In 2015 The Leadership of St Brigid's selected their priorities 2015 – 2020:

1. Catholic Faith, Life and Culture.
2. Excellence in International Education
3. Community
4. Leadership
5. Extraordinary Aboriginal Education
6. Human, Financial and Capital Development

At each meeting of the Advisory Council, Mrs Carmen Cox continues to give a very comprehensive report, acknowledging how these priorities are being addressed.

Quite often I am asked, what is the purpose of the Advisory Council? In short it is to act as a consultative Council for the College Leadership, and the community, in the provision of Catholic Education: To promote the Mercy Charism and to assist the Principal and staff in policy making. Another important role is to assist in the preparation of the College budget and to recommend its adoption by Mercy Education Limited. We also give advice with regard to Capital Development, College facilities and equipment. A very important aspect, along with the Parent Forum, is to assist in developing relationships within the College community, and further to the wider community. We are often advised of members of the College Leadership team, in particular Annamaria Cream, going to many country gatherings to visit families, promote our Boarding facilities, Curriculum offerings and all St Brigid's has to offer students who cannot access a high-school education in their community. Annamaria, in her role as Director of Community Relations, facilitates the welcome of parents and children new to the College. All members invited to the Council bring a particular expertise and freely give advice to the Council and Leadership on matters pertaining to their expertise.

It has been pleasing to welcome to the Council in 2019 Mrs Shirley Quaresimin. Shirley is a grandmother of students attending St Brigid's. She is a strong leader within the Aboriginal Catholic Education Community and has many years of experience in her work in Catholic Education, both in Perth and Broome Dioceses.

The question in many people's mind must be, how does one become a member of the Advisory Council? According to the Constitution for College Advisory Councils for Mercy Education Limited Schools, the Principal invites membership from members of the College community who have a particular expertise to offer. So, if you have a desire to be a member of the Council, it is important that you make yourself known to Mrs Carmen Cox and discuss your motivation.

The over-arching work of the Council is to provide advice and support to the Principal and the Staff of the College. Members of the College Council are valued for their wisdom and the contribution they make to the functioning of the College and work together to ensure that Mercy Ethos (spirit) underpins the life of the College.

Our monthly meetings are usually succinct, as all members come to the meeting with papers read and questions ready to clarify any query they may have. The work of Mrs Pauline

Guerinoni is paramount and this, together with the diligence shown by the Council Members, makes for a very informed and efficient meeting together.

The Wisdom of the group is a blessing.

Mr Neil Grime prepares current Financial Reports and is managing the budget within the fiscal reality of the College. At the same time, provision for the needs of the day-to-day running of the College and Boarding accommodation happen. He is always diligent in making savings that are for the good of all. Neil and his team are compassionate and do understand the struggles that some in our community are having in meeting the constant demands on their finances. They do their best to assist in relieving some stress. These matters are always dealt with in confidence. In current economic times, it is very important that the financial management of the College is in very capable hands. The Advisory Council is confident that the Finance Team, together with the Principal, are capable financial managers of the best use of your school fees as well as with both State and Federal Government Grants.

Retiring Members of the Advisory Council - I wish to take the time to thank the Hon. Michael Murray AM QC. Michael came on the Council as a grandfather of a student, with a great interest in the programs being offered. He has remained for the full tenure of his time as a real figure of wisdom. Michael has been able to clarify many issues and intelligently question, until clarification is there for all of us, before any decision would be made in relation to the well-being of both students and staff. Michael and his wife have made significant personal contributions of time and social effort, both at the meetings and at many College events and celebrations, although his grandchild has long left the College. Michael will finish his tenure on the Council at the end of this year and we sincerely hope his interest and wisdom will continue to be available when needed.

Sr Beverley Stott will also finish as a member of the Advisory Council at the end of 2019. Beverley, an ex- student of the College, entered the Sisters of Mercy and was Congregational Leader when life was changing for all religious and, in particular, the Sisters of Mercy West Perth. Sr Beverley was also the Leader when very significant decisions needed to be made regarding the Management of the College. She has been, and is, a constant driver for what is fair, just and good for St Brigid's. Sr Beverley has a keen interest in the Education being offered and was certainly involved with Dr Amelia Toffoli in the introduction of the IB program. Her interest in girls' education is quiet, yet vigorous.

Sr Beverley, together with the Archbishop of Perth, appointed the first Lay Principal of St Brigid's, Mrs Mary Retel, who is an ex-student of the College, and negotiated the handing over of the direct management responsibility to Mercy Education Limited at the time of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea was becoming a reality. In fact, Sr Beverley is credited with having written a paper that had all Sisters of Mercy of Australia and PNG thinking about our future. Now, there is an ex-student with intent for all that is Inspirational!

Sr Beverley's quiet counsel to the Leadership of St Brigid's over many years has been a blessing and although she will no longer be attending regular meetings of the Council, her interest and love of all that is St Brigid's College will not fade.

This is my last report as Chair of the Advisory Council. It has been a most rewarding experience. May all at St Brigid's College continue to be Mercy people who experience forgiveness, relief, renewed strength, hope, trust, belief and healing.

Sr Joan Buckham rsm
Advisory Council Chair 2019