St Joseph’s Primary School
Merriwa

PARENT HANDBOOK

EMPOWERING AND CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO BECOME LIFELONG LEARNERS

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St Joseph’s Primary School Merriwa:
A community of Catholic faith
where the uniqueness of each child
will be nurtured and valued.
Where students will be
empowered and challenged
to become lifelong learners with
optimism and hope for the future.

REligious Education

While Religious Education lessons form a part of each day, Christianity is a way of loving and therefore should influence every aspect of our school life. We strive to deepen the child’s understanding and knowledge of the Catholic Faith, as well as developing a climate that will help children grow in their faith relationship with Christ.

Religious Education becomes meaningful when young people relate their study to real life situations. At St Joseph’s Religious Education certainly takes on this dimension. It also endeavours to help the students develop Christian attitudes and values which they will try to live out in the family, school and the local community.

Liturgical celebrations are an intrinsic component of the Religious Education program. School liturgies are celebrated each Monday afternoon in the K/1/2 classroom. Mass is celebrated on special feast days throughout the year. Parents and family friends are always most welcome and actively encouraged to join all class and school religious celebrations. Preparation for the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Confirmation is family based and supported by parish and school programs.
HISTORY OF ST JOSEPH’S

St. Joseph’s Catholic School, Merriwa, was founded in 1883 when the Catholic people of the district agreed to contribute ten pounds per month to employ a teacher. Miss E. Cooper (some records state “Cook”) was offered the position.

By March of 1884 the number of students had increased, requiring a second teacher.

On 5th January, 1885, three Sisters of St. Joseph took up residence in Merriwa. They were the first Foundation formed from Lochinvar, which had come into existence only two years earlier in 1883.

School records go back to 1886 (unfortunately the first records of 1885 have been lost.) The total enrolment was 77, 39 girls and 38 boys. On 25th November, 1928, Bishop Dwyer blessed the new school in Marquet Street. On 31st January, 1954, Bishop Toohey blessed the new infants classroom and on 19th January, 1961, blessed the new school building of three classrooms. Secondary classes operated at St. Joseph’s Merriwa from the early 1950’s to 1968. For 125 years St Joseph’s Catholic School has offered quality Catholic Education to the children of the Merriwa district.

OUR SCHOOL TODAY

Though the Sisters of St Joseph are no longer teaching at the school, the three resident Sisters maintain contact through their involvement in parish and school activities. Current enrolment is 62 students K-6. The staff includes a Principal, three full time teachers, two part time teachers, a part-time Learning Support Teacher, a part-time Learning Support Assistant, a part-time Teacher-Librarian, part-time Library Assistant and a Clerical Assistant.

St Joseph’s is very well resourced in terms of equipment and support personnel. Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music provides individual tuition in guitar, piano, violin, drums, clarinet, trumpet and trombone on a user pays basis. A school band is also tutored by the Conservatorium.

A Special Education Adviser and a Registered Psychologist are available to assist the school in assessing and addressing individual students needs.

St Joseph’s is also supported by an enthusiastic Parents & Friends Association, who are keen to provide funds which assist St Joseph’s in providing up-to-date learning facilities for their children.
CURRICULUM

Key Learning Areas

Today’s school curriculum reflects the changing needs of society. The curriculum today is organised into outcomes. An Outcome is the knowledge, skills or understanding that children are to achieve.

The curriculum is organised into Key Learning Areas. They are:

- Religious Education
- English
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- Human Society and it’s Environment (HSIE)
- Creative Arts (CPA)
- Personal Development/Health/Physical Education (PD/H/PE)

The curriculum is presented to children over a two-year cycle known as a stage. This approach acknowledges individual learning styles and differences. Therefore the curriculum is structured not in year levels but in a stage:

- Early Stage 1: Kindergarten
- Stage 1: Yr 1 and Yr 2
- Stage 2: Yr 3 and Yr 4
- Stage 3: Yr 5 and Yr 6

The school plans, teaches and assesses children’s outcomes in Stages as recommended by the NSW Board of Studies.

The school has Internet access in classrooms and the library. Technology is a vital tool in the learning process. Electronic Smartboards are located in each classroom and provide a valuable interactive learning experience. Children have access to fixed and laptop computers at school for research purposes as well as multimedia presentations.

Assessment and Reporting

Assessment & reporting at St Joseph’s is considered critical in the educational process, as it provides relevant and useful information for teachers, students and parents about the teaching and learning that occurs over a period of time. This belief is supported by the fact that assessment and reporting is a dynamic process that fosters the ongoing development of the whole child.

Detailed progress reports outlining your child’s learning and achievements are sent home twice a year - at the end of term 2 and towards the end of term 4.

Both formal and informal Parent-Teacher interviews can be arranged at any time during the year.
**DAILY TIMETABLE**

8:30am  Supervision commences  
8.55 - 11.15am  Morning classes  
11.15 - 12.00  Lunch / Daily PE  
12.00 - 1.30pm  Middle Session  
1.30 - 2.00pm  Recess  
2.00 - 3:00pm  Afternoon Session  
3.00pm  Afternoon Assembly

**Sport**

Children are provided with the opportunity to learn a number of sports. In today’s world of increasing leisure time and the need for exercise it is important to the child’s total development to participate as fully as possible in the program provided.

All children participate in swimming lessons during the summer. School carnivals are organised for swimming, athletics, cross-country and netball. Children are given the opportunity to participate and represent their school in a variety of competitive sports.

A note must be given to the class teacher if a child is not able to participate for a good reason. Such non-participation should be kept to a minimum for the sake of the child’s health and well-being.

Our sport day is varies term to term depending on the activity. Children are required to wear their sport uniform on the advised day.

The daily PE program involves children participating in a variety of activities each morning before classes commence. Sport uniform will not be necessary for these activities, however children are required to wear or bring their joggers each day, and to change into their black school schools before entering the classroom.
**Library**

The school has a well-stocked, computerised library from which the children may borrow each week. We ask that all children have a library bag to protect their books. There is borrowing each **Wednesday** and you are encouraged to show an interest in the books that your child borrows. Children participate in formal library lessons each Wednesday.

Ashton Scholastic **Book Club** operates within the school, providing families with the opportunity to purchase books and encourage reading at home.

**Homework**

Homework is given to reinforce concepts learnt at school. Specific homework details are issued at the Parent Information Night at the commencement of the new year.

**Newsletter**

A school newsletter is sent home with the eldest in the family each fortnight or distributed via email. You are asked to read it very carefully as it is a vital means of communication between the school and the home. Other notes may be sent home as the need arises. Please check your child’s bag each day. Spare notes are always kept in the office if you misplace or do not receive one.

**Absence Notes**

If a child is away from school through illness, or any other reason, a note should be supplied on return to school. The roll is a legal document and without a note explaining your child’s absence the computer defaults to ‘ABSENCE UNEXPLAINED’ after seven days and this becomes part of your child’s official record. Parents are requested to phone the school and notify the class teacher if you know your child will be absent from school.

**Late Arrival/Early Departure Book**

Parents/guardians are required to sign their child in or out of school if they
are arriving late or leaving early for any reason. A book is kept in the school office for this purpose. This again is a legal requirement and also ensures a correct record is kept of your child’s attendance at school.

**Buses**

Buses service our school from Sandy Hollow, Giants Creek, Cassilis, Willow Tree/Mountain Station Rds, Idaville Rd and Cullingral/Ringwood Rds. All buses are operated by Cowans Bus Service. All infants children are eligible for a bus pass. Primary children must reside further that 1.6km radius from the school to be eligible. If you travel more that 1.6km to the nearest bus stop please enquire at the office about a transport subsidy. Children are expected to obey the instructions of the driver at all times and conduct themselves properly on the bus. Continued misbehaviour will result in the loss of the bus pass.

**Change of Routine**

Parents are requested to inform the school if a change of routine occurs regarding their child’s transport arrangements, mode of travel to and from school or supervision arrangements.

**Discipline**

Parental support in dealing with discipline issues is of utmost importance. Parents’ own experiences of school reflect significantly upon the child’s perception of school. We ask for your support in dealing with matters of misbehaviour. By showing a united and supportive front the child will be clear in what is expected. Often if a parent is called to school it is to work through a problem and discuss the best way of together dealing with the issue at hand. If necessary we can refer the child for counselling.

**Canteen**

Canteen operates every Wednesday on a voluntary basis thanks to the generosity of our parents and the P&F. Canteen price lists are sent home at the start of the term with the school newsletter. Senior students run the canteen for 15 minutes on Mondays and Fridays, where the children can purchase iceblocks, frozen yoghurts and drinks.
Excursions

From time to time, class and whole school excursions are planned for children attending St Joseph’s. Excursions play an important role in extending the classroom experience in a tangible and meaningful way. Written permission will be sought at the time of excursions. Each year the senior class (5-6) attends a ‘school camp’ which is a wonderful experience for the whole group. A limited number of parents are invited to attend and those who have done so have found it a wonderful experience.

Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music

We are fortunate to have the services of the Conservatorium at our school and we are able to offer lessons in guitar, violin and piano. We also offer school band lessons in a variety of instruments. These lessons are an ‘extra’ and are taken during school time with a private teacher. If you would like your child to take lessons please contact the office or the Conservatorium on 6541 4888.

Special Assemblies

Several special assemblies are held throughout the year to celebrate the children’s achievements. All parents and friends are welcome.
Parents & Friends

St Joseph’s P&F welcomes new members. The support of the P&F is integral to the efficient running of the school. The P&F have responsibility for the running of several committees within the school. Parental participation on these committees is actively encouraged. Meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month or as determined by the committee. Notice is given via the school newsletter prior to the meeting advising time, venue and agenda.

Parental Involvement

We welcome and encourage parental involvement in many school activities. Parents are always welcome in the classroom to assist with literacy and numeracy programs and other class activities. There are also many other opportunities for parents to be involved in other aspects of the school such as the library, book fairs, sporting events and canteen.

Home-School Liaison

The education of each child is a joint responsibility that is greatly enhanced by maximum cooperation of all involved. The staff of St Joseph’s are aware of their responsibility and endeavour to foster a meaningful and helpful liaison with the parents of each child.

Therefore parents and carers are:
• encouraged to attend parent-teacher meetings to meet their child’s teacher and be familiar with class/school policy, procedures and programmes and discuss their child’s progress
• Encouraged to make an appointment to see the teacher whenever they feel it is necessary—outside class times
• Invited and encouraged to join in celebrations of class/school liturgies, concerts, special events and sports days
• Requested to join the Sacramental programs and personal development programs where the teachers assist them in their roles as the first educators of their children
• Encouraged to come along to the monthly meetings of the P&F and support organised activities
• Requested to read regular newsletters and other communications from the school to keep them informed of activities and policies
Encouraged to communicate anything that may be helpful in understanding and caring for their child. They will be assured that confidential matters remain that way.

**Permission Notes**

Permission notes signed by a parent are required in the following circumstances:
- to leave the grounds during a school day
- when out of uniform
- when absent from school
- when arriving late or leaving early—the person dropping off or collecting the child must sign the ‘late arrival/early departure book’ which is located in the office foyer

**School Banking**

We have school banking available each Thursday. Banking is conducted through the Catholic Development Fund which offers a range of savings and investment products. School Banking is a great way of teaching your child good saving and budgeting habits.

**Health**

Children who are unwell should not be sent to school. If your child has been ill with an infectious disease, the child should not return to school until fully recovered. Such infectious diseases have recommended periods of withdrawal. Children with certain skin diseases may return to school once appropriate treatment has been obtained.

Children seeking enrolment must supply a vaccination certificate from the doctor, which will be photocopied and returned to you.

**Visitor/Volunteer Sign In Register**

All persons visiting or volunteering at the school for any reason are requested to report to the school office and sign the register. It is a legal requirement that we keep a record of all persons on the school grounds. This also assists us with evacuation procedures.
SCHOOL FEES

School fees are integral to the operation of Catholic Schools. A percentage of school fees is paid to the Catholic Schools Office to supplement Federal and State Government Grants. The remainder of fees is retained at the school to meet recurrent costs. Fees are billed over the first three terms and an account is forwarded at the beginning of each term. Prompt payment upon receipt is much appreciated. Provision is available for weekly, fortnightly or monthly payment by direct debit.

School fees are set by the Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle each year. Fees for 2013 are listed below:

Tuition Fees
A family discount applies dependent on the number of children attending Maitland-Newcastle diocesan schools. Fees for children in Kinder to Year 6 for 2013 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Child</td>
<td>$1017.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Children</td>
<td>$915.30 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Children</td>
<td>$813.60 each</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concessions can be granted to families who hold a Health Care Card or are experiencing financial hardship. If at any stage you need to discuss fees please contact the Principal. All arrangements will be kept confidential. No child will ever be excluded from St Joseph’s Merriwa because of genuine financial concerns.

Resource Fee
A Resource Fee is charged along with the tuition fee for each of the first three terms. This fee covers all the consumable materials your child will need during the year (pens, pencils, exercise books, photocopying etc). This fee also incorporates the levies previously charged for sport, technology and text books. The 2013 Resource Fee is $228.00 per child per annum.

Diocesan Family School Building Levy
The Diocesan Family School Building Levy is a diocesan charge (per family) and is collected by the school at which the eldest student in the family attends. The income from the levy contributes to the capital and maintenance costs of the facilities. Catholic Schools collect the DFSBL because there is a gap between the recurrent grants/school fees receive and the cost of capital to provide appropriate facilities in Catholic Schools. The 2013 DFSBL is $580 per year, charged over the first three terms with other fees.
SCHOOL UNIFORM

We have a school uniform policy and the correct full school uniform should be worn at all times. If for any reason your child is unable to wear the correct uniform, a note of explanation is required.

St Joseph’s P&F operate a uniform shop at the school where uniforms are available at reasonable prices—see separate uniform booklet provided by the P&F.

Sunsafe Procedures

The school hat is a compulsory part of the uniform for summer and winter and we have a ‘No Hat—Play in the Shade’ Policy. Children will wear hats to protect their face, neck and ears whenever outside. Children who do not have their hat at school will only be allowed to play in shaded areas. This hat may be purchased from the P&F’s uniform shop.

Non-compulsory Extras

Green and gold taslon jackets may be worn over sloppy joe or bomber jacket. These jacket are meant to be worn outside only. This jacket is suitable for the very cold days that we sometimes experience.

School bags and library/swimming bags are also available from the school uniform shop.

Children’s sunglasses are also available and children are welcomed and encouraged to wear these outside, especially during summer.

Accessories

Ribbons, bands and combs in school colour only (bottle green) may be worn. Jewellery is not to be worn with the uniform (girls may wear a signet ring and one pair of plain earrings or studs).

Special Plea

Please ensure all clothing articles are clearly labelled with your child’s full
St Joseph’s Merriwa School Uniform

Girls

Summer Full Uniform  Summer dress
Green socks & black leather shoes

Summer Sports Uniform  Sports shirt
Green netball skirt
Green socks & sports shoes

Winter Full Uniform  Green long sleeve shirt
School tie
Green slacks & green socks, or
Green long box pleat skirt & stockings
Black leather shoes
Green v-neck jumper, bomber jacket and/or vest optional. Green & gold school jacket optional for outdoor activities.

Winter Sports Uniform  Same as for summer but green tracksuit can also be worn.

Boys

Summer Full Uniform  Short sleeve green shirt
Green shorts
Green socks & black leather shoes

Summer Sports Uniform  Sports shirt
Sports shorts
Green socks & sports shoes

Winter Full Uniform  Long sleeve green shirt
School tie
Green trousers
Green socks & black leather shoes
Green v-neck jumper, bomber jacket and/or vest optional. Green & gold school jacket optional for outdoor activities.

Winter Sports Uniform  Same as for summer but green tracksuit can also be worn.

All students are to wear our school’s slouch hat.
CHILD PROTECTION

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle are committed to providing safe environments for students. Whilst we have a legal obligation to protect children, this commitment is central to our Catholic beliefs. At St Joseph’s Primary School we believe that all children have a right to a safe environment which is free from any form of abuse or harm. At St Joseph’s relationships between adults and children are governed by trust and Gospel values.

Schools in NSW are required to meet the statutory obligations of legislation relating to child protection. Schools in this diocese are required to uphold the policies and guidelines set out by the Catholic Schools Office.

This legislation includes:

- The Ombudsman Amendment (Child Protection and Community Services) Act, 1998
- The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act, 1998
- Commission for Children and Young People Act, 1998

Catholic Schools Office documents include:

- Child Protection – Identifying and Notifying Abuse
- Guidelines for the Implementation of the Ombudsman Amendment Act
- Child Protection – Procedures for Schools
- Code of Professional Standards for Catholic School Employees

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act

This legislation establishes a shared responsibility for the protection of children. Teachers have a legal responsibility to report a child or young person who is at risk of harm. This means that staff at St Joseph’s Primary School Merriwa are required by law to make a report to the Department of Community Services when they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse or neglect. This includes physical,
sexual and psychological abuse, exposure to domestic/family violence, homelessness or the inability of the parents to provide appropriate medical care for the child or young person.

**Child Protection and Volunteers**

Being a volunteer in a school is an important task. St Joseph’s Primary School would not be able to function as well as we do without the contribution made by the myriad of volunteers who so generously give of their time and expertise. Unfortunately, history has shown us that some adults put themselves in situations where they can use their positions of trust and power to harm children. This history has resulted in legislation in NSW which aims to protect children from abuse.

The legislation that applies specifically to volunteers includes:

- Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998
- NSW Ombudsman Act 1974

**Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998**

This legislation was enacted as a recommendation of the 1997 Wood Royal Commission. Under this legislation, in a school context, ‘employees’ include all persons, paid or unpaid, who have direct, unsupervised contact with children or young people through any aspect of their work in, or for, the school. It aims to protect children and young people from contact with people who have been convicted of the following:

- serious sex offence;
- child-related personal violence;
- murder of a child;
- indecency offences punishable by imprisonment of 12 months or more;
- kidnapping (unless the offender is or has been the child’s parent or carer);
- offences connected with child prostitution;
- possession, distribution or publication of child pornography; or
- attempt, conspiracy or incitement to commit the above offences.

A prohibited person includes a Registrable person under the Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000.

Examples of ‘employees’ who perform a task for the school include, but are not limited to:
- volunteers assisting in classrooms, e.g. reading or library helpers;
- those attending a “working bee”;
- persons providing transport on the request of the school;
- anyone assisting in the school canteen;
- people assisting with camps, retreats, community days and excursions;
- religious and clergy who attend the school for liturgies, retreats or services.

All volunteers are required to complete a Prohibited Employment Declaration prior to commencing as a volunteer. Declarations are available from Sally at the school office. Volunteers must read the Declaration, sign it and return it to the school.

It is very important for volunteers to read the Declaration before signing as it is an offence for a prohibited person to apply for, undertake, or remain in child-related employment.
Volunteers not willing to provide a Prohibited Employment Declaration are not permitted to undertake any duties in the school.

A volunteer who has any doubts about his/her status should seek independent legal advice.

NSW Ombudsman Act 1974

This Act guides the Catholic Schools Office and school’s response when a child protection allegation has been made against an employee. It applies to paid and unpaid employees (volunteers) in schools.

The Act requires the school to notify allegations that constitute sexual offences, misconduct, assault, ill-treatment, neglect and behaviour that causes psychological harm to children to the Diocesan Child Protection and Professional Conduct Unit (DCPPCU).

Once the allegation is received by the DCPPCU it is reported to the Ombudsman’s Office. The DCPPCU then conducts an investigation into the allegation. The investigation gathers facts relevant to the allegation and arrives at a finding at its conclusion. The process of investigation provides the employee with an opportunity to respond to the allegation and have the response heard. All evidence is considered before a decision is made in regard to the finding.

Further information about this process is available from the DCPPCU, ph: 4940 8091.
CONTINUING EDUCATION
IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Continuing access to Catholic Education, from Kindergarten to Year 12, is available to children who have attended St Joseph’s Primary, Merriwa.

A bus travels daily to St Joseph’s High School, Aberdeen and this service is run by the Catholic Education Office. This travel is free and has proved enormously successful. Catholic students who have attended St Joseph’s Primary, Merriwa, or another Catholic feeder primary school, are given priority enrolment at St Joseph’s High School, Aberdeen.

St Joseph’s High School is a very highly regarded secondary college with an enviable reputation for delivering quality education and access to a wide range of elective subjects. St Joseph’s Aberdeen has a proven record of academic excellence, with a large proportion of senior students attending university. Students have also regularly achieved results that place them in the top of the state.
VISION STATEMENT

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A community of Catholic faith
where the uniqueness of each child
will be nurtured and valued.
Where students will be
empowered and challenged
to become
lifelong learners with
optimism and
hope for the future.

We will achieve this vision by:

- Working together with students, families, parishioners and members of the wider community.
- Providing ongoing opportunities for students to understand and embrace the teachings of Christ and the traditions of the Catholic Church.
- Ensuring that Gospel values support all school policies and procedures.
- Providing a meaningful and inclusive learning program which caters for the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, social and physical dimensions of all students.
- Recognising and celebrating all that is good in our school, family, community, country and the world.
- Teaching students by example to become problem solvers and forward thinkers.
- Demonstrating an appreciation of our environment and our responsibility for its preservation.
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