

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Handbook

Years 7 to 9



Mount Evelyn Christian School

Welcome

For decades now MECS has been on the cutting edge of Middle Schooling. Long before most other Australian schools had even considered the concept of Middle Schools, MECS has been providing a distinctive educational approach through our Middle School which is tailored specifically for the learning and developmental needs of early adolescents.

However, this does not mean that the Middle School program at MECS has become stale. Middle Schooling at MECS has continued to be responsive to the societal and technological changes that impact adolescents. The Middle School teachers intentionally meet the range of academic needs of each student while at the same time catering for the complex pastoral care needs of students as they navigate the changes and challenges of adolescence. This also includes assisting the students through the important transitions from Primary School and later through to Senior Secondary education.

The Middle School has a dedicated, well trained and collegial staffing team, which works closely together to empower each student. Foundational to all that happens in the MECS Middle School, as indeed the whole school, is a clear and defining Christ-centredness. This means that students, together with parents and staff, are involved meaningfully in their educational journey. It is also very evident in the dynamic and diverse curriculum offerings from the Term Tasters, to the extensive Camping program, to the Year 9 Open Village.

I am very excited to again be a part of the MECS Middle School team and I look forward to partnering with you over the coming years.



Mr Allan Long
Middle School Coordinator



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*“For we are
God’s handiwork,
created in Christ Jesus
to do good works,
which God prepared in
advance for us to do.”
Ephesians 2:10*

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A Unique Perspective

A Unique Perspective

Transformative Christian education

Learning at Mount Evelyn Christian School has a clear purpose, the transformation of students and teachers so that they might have the mind, heart and life of Christ and be his disciples. At the centre of our convictions about education is that schooling is for responsive discipleship. It is our hope and endeavour that students will follow Jesus Christ in obedience.

Discipleship involves responsiveness. As students engage with God's world and word they are encouraged to respond with wisdom and knowledge, with discernment and creativity, with playfulness and perseverance, with love and compassion. Responsive discipleship in the educational setting of the school is characterised by unwrapping God's gifts, sharing each other's burdens and working for shalom.

As disciples, students and teachers will understand themselves to be participants in God's work; the total renewal of creation which started with the resurrection of Jesus, was demonstrated in the faithful activity of his followers, and will come to completion when Jesus comes again in power.

MECS introduces students to the goodness of God's creation, the radical distortion in every dimension of life caused by human rebellion and the renewal of all of life in the birth, life, death and resurrection and coming again of Jesus.

Students will understand that they are invited to participate in the great mandate to develop and steward God's world, the great commission to be witnesses to God's coming Kingdom, the great commandment to love as Jesus loves, and the great communion to participate in the covenant community of God's people. They learn to be 'God's people in God's place under God's rule.'

Transformation involves shaping the desires of students and teachers towards the kingdom for the purpose of 'shalom', the integrated wholeness, wellbeing and harmony in every dimension of life that God intends for his creation. Transformation of heart, mind, spirit and life is the work of the Holy Spirit and the school shapes its educational experiences and settings in openness to the direction and guidance of the Spirit.

*Transformational Education,
(2014, MECS, p19)*



A Unique Perspective

The Unique Nature of Middle Schoolers

Understanding the unique nature of Middle Schoolers is an important challenge for both parents and teachers of this age group. The adolescent years are critical. Students experience significant changes physically, morally, socially, and intellectually. They are moving from being a child and heading toward their adult years. They are growing in independence and competence. Loving guidance from responsible adults is more important than ever.

It is not only our students who can find this transition a challenge to navigate. Parents, too, often experience a 'letting go' of their child. This feeling can be much more acute when it is the first child to enter the Middle School years.

Rick Wormeli, an experienced Middle School teacher and author, writes of students in this age group:

"They move from concrete to abstract thinking and from absurdity to rationality, and back again. They deal with tremendous pressures from peers, parents, and society, all the while searching for identity, purpose, security, and acceptance. These shifts produce strong emotions. Acting out, feeling hurt, defining authority by defying it, and alternating between being a child and being an adult all create situations that demand guidance from compassionate adults who have lived through these phases."

At MECS, our Middle School teachers are compassionate adults in the lives of our students. Teachers seek to understand the unique challenges of this age group and to provide developmentally appropriate learning opportunities. We desire to help our students with the transition between the protection and warmth of their Primary years, and the independence and individual programs of the Senior School years. We walk along side them in these years of change and uncertainty, as they begin to understand their unique identities and move toward independence.

Much time and research* has gone into understanding the changes that occur during these years. Young adolescents:

- Experience rapid, irregular physical growth;
- Have varying maturity rates;
- Experience restlessness and fatigue due to hormonal changes;
- Need daily physical activity because of increased energy;
- Have preferences for junk food but need good nutrition;
- Continue to develop sexual awareness;
- Display a wide range of individual intellectual development;
- Are intensely curious and have a wide range of intellectual pursuits;
- Prefer active over passive learning experiences;
- May show disinterest in conventional school subjects;
- Respond positively to opportunities to connect learning to real-life situations;
- Are developing a capacity to understand higher levels of humour;
- Are inquisitive about adults and are keen observers of them;
- Are increasingly capable of assessing moral matters in shades of grey;
- Rely on parents and significant adults for advice.

*This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents, (2010: Association for Middle Level Education).



Middle School Values

For many years the Middle School staff have wrestled with, focussed on, and aimed to articulate their hopes and understandings for our Middle School students. The staff team have extensively studied what 'makes teenagers tick', 'how do teenagers learn effectively,' and have explored various ways of investing in the 'whole person' development of our students.

The values of Humility, Thankfulness, Self-Control, Co-operation and Adventurousness were chosen for their relevance to all young people. Each of these values meets the individual where they are at, forms a wonderful base for rules and expectations, and assists to clearly articulate the culture we are hoping to cultivate in the Middle School.

Humility

Often misunderstood or misinterpreted, 'true humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less' (CS Lewis). It is the quality of being courteous and respectful of others. Acting with humility is not about denying our own value or self worth. Rather, it affirms the inherent worth of others.

Thankfulness

Thankfulness is a wholehearted response. It stems from a consciousness of God's gifts and blessings. It is a joyfulness that erupts into praise. The Apostle Paul frequently encourages us in the Bible to 'be thankful' (Colossians 3:15), to 'give thanks in all circumstances' (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and says that our lives should 'overflow with thankfulness' (Colossians 2:7).

"God gave you the gift of 86,400 seconds today. Have you used one to say thank you?"
Anon

Self-Control

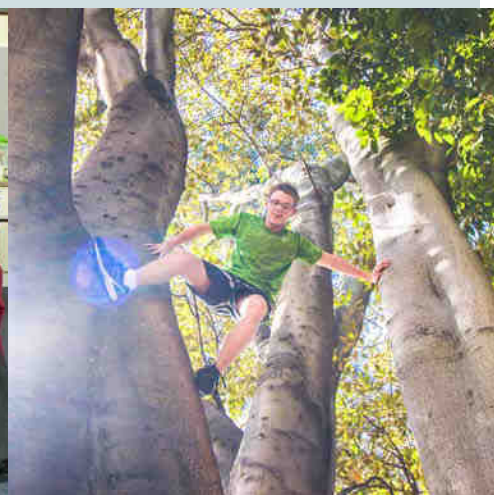
Self-control is about acting with our 'wise mind' rather than with our immediate highly emotional/irrational or highly reserved mindset. Self-control is the ability to control our own behaviour. Sometimes this might also include controlling our immediate response to 'run in fear' of a challenge.

Co-operation

Co-operation is a willingness and ability to work with others to accomplish a common goal. It works to maintain positive relationships with family, teachers and peers. It is about taking responsibility for the part we play in helping to bring out the best in all. Co-operation is welcoming, open, works within guidelines, listens and values.

Adventurousness

To be adventurous is to stretch ourselves beyond our comfort zone. It is about taking risks (in learning and experiences) within the safety of the school environment. It is not about recklessness, but rather it is about challenging ourselves and maintaining a growth mindset.



A Unique Perspective

Transitioning from Primary School

Although most of our Year 7s have come up through MECS Primary and are only physically moving a few metres up the hill, the Middle School is a whole new world. It looks different and it feels different from primary school. There are new teachers, new rooms, new students, new subjects, new play spaces and new processes!

Students are expected to get to their classes on time with all the appropriate materials. They are expected to manage their homework and classwork from multiple teachers who have varying expectations. All the new-ness can be extremely over-whelming and anxiety producing.

As a Middle School team, we understand that this is a time of enormous change for our students and their families and we are keen to make this transition as smooth as possible. While these students often look forward to and embrace the increasing independence, they are still in need of protection, security, structure, and advocacy. I am particularly passionate about this age group and am delighted to have the role of Year 7 Transition Coordinator.

For our students, the transition into Middle School begins in Year 6. As part of my role, I visit Senior Primary classes throughout the year in order to build relationships with the students. This means that when they reach Year 7 they already have someone they feel comfortable with while they settle in. I facilitate the Year 6 Empowering Girls program, and attend Year 6 camp. We have a schedule of Transition activities later in the year, including the Year 7 Family Information Evening, Orientation Day and a Q&A session with Year 6 and Year 7 students. The purpose of these activities

is to alleviate any stress students may be feeling, by answering their questions, familiarising them with new places, faces and spaces, and giving them a clear idea of what Middle School will be like.

If you have any questions about the transition process into Secondary school, or if your Year 7 child needs extra support settling into Middle School, please let me know so we can assist!



Ms Olivia Dyer
Middle School Transition Coordinator



Transitioning into Senior School

When transitioning to a different section of the school, it is natural for many students to feel apprehensive. In particular, students coming into Year 10 may feel anxious about what their relationships might look like. This includes relationships not only with each other but with their teachers.

After three years in the Middle School, where they may feel well known and understood by their teachers, students can feel worried about coming to a place where “nobody really knows them.”

MECS is a relational community that values “committed partnerships... and a relationally nurturing environment” (MECS Transformational Education: A Framework for Christian Teaching, p79).

In my role as Year 10 Transition Coordinator, my first and foremost concern is that students feel as though they are ‘known’ as quickly as possible.

During Orientation Day, students are invited to fill out a questionnaire about their learning preferences and there is room for them to write down anything they would like their new teachers to know about them. Each year we have done this I have been humbled by the trust and honesty they have shown in their responses.

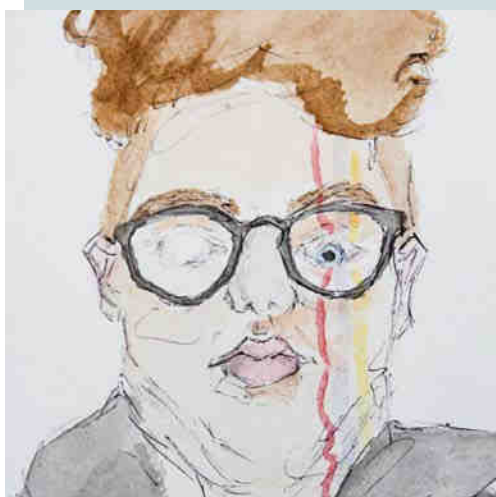
Throughout the first semester of Year 10, I meet with each student individually as part of the Careers program. This is often a time to delve below the surface and get to the bottom of perceived obstacles to their learning. This can be very empowering for students as they explore strategies to overcoming their personal challenges, but they can also feel a sense of relief that someone really sees them and what is going on in their lives.

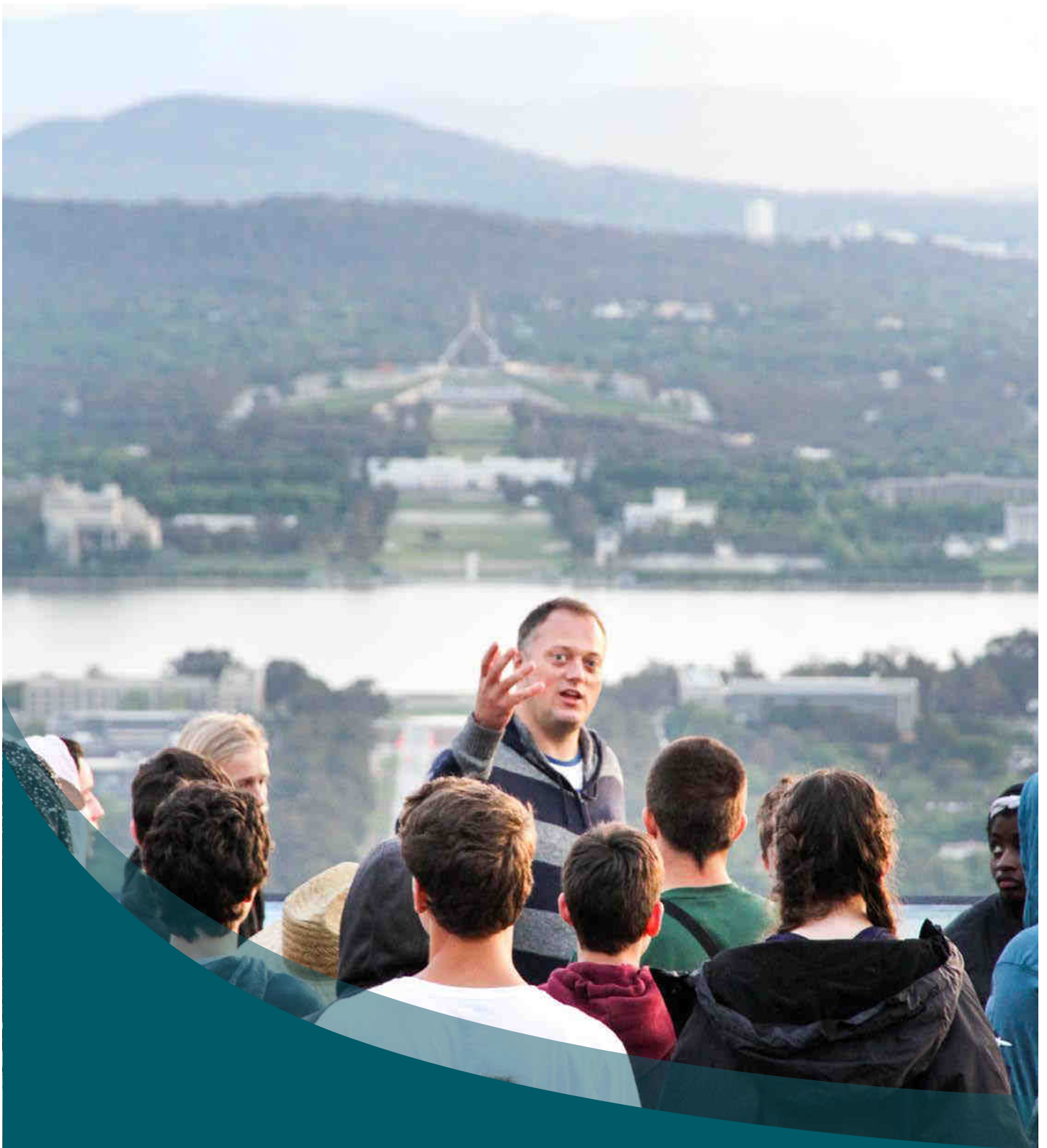
Students are encouraged to build a positive relationship with their *Connect-In* teacher in the Senior School, who also takes on a pastoral care role. This teacher ideally should be the one who students come to initially if there are any concerns personally and/or educationally.

Finally, parents are strongly encouraged to assist the Senior School teachers in getting to know their children. Committed partnerships, characterised by open communication, are of immense value in this transition period and throughout the Senior School experience.



Mrs Amelia Koole
Senior School Coordinator





A Dedicated team

A Dedicated team

Our Commitment

MECS Middle School provides curriculum, teachers and a learning environment that recognises that Christ is Lord of all of life. We see each child as being created in God's image, with unique gifts that are to be celebrated and nurtured.

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Ephesians 2:10

This verse speaks to three areas: identity, purpose, and belonging:

- **Identity** – Students are created by God and are works of art whom he loves. They are not handiworks in waiting but are valued here and now.
- **Purpose** – God has plans for each of us. We encourage students to try new things, achieve their academic potential, discover skills and passions, and do good works now and in the future.
- **Belonging** – We are God's handiwork. This is a collective term; students belong to a community and we encourage them to seek out opportunities to serve others.

As Middle School teachers, we are committed to:

- Being a caring and responsible guide to the students in our care;
- Providing a nurturing and purposeful learning environment;
- Providing timely and valuable feedback to students regarding learning tasks;
- Providing parents with both constructive feedback and encouragement regarding student progress;
- Making learning engaging and interesting;
- Challenging our students through academic rigour;
- Trying new things and being innovative in our teaching;
- Understanding and providing for the learning needs of each student;
- Providing models of what we expect of our students;
- Connecting student learning with real stories and real people in the real world.

"The Years 7-9 teachers at MECS are a cohesive and incredible team, and specifically skilled to work with this age group. They are more than teachers of subjects, they are holders of hearts who walk ahead of the kids and come behind them. The young woman I am raising is stronger, more confident, and has an increased capacity to dream her future because of the teachers around her."

MECS Parent



A Dedicated team

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A Community of Learners

A Community of Learners

“Academic success and personal growth increase markedly when young adolescents’ affective needs are met. Therefore, every adult in developmentally responsive middle level schools serves as an advocate, advisor, and mentor. The concept of advocacy is fundamental to the school’s culture, embedded in its every aspect. Advocacy is not a singular event or a period in the schedule, it is an attitude of caring that translates into actions, big and small, when adults respond to the needs of each young adolescent in their charge.”

This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents, (2010: Association for Middle Level Education, p35).

Pastoral Care

At MECS, each Middle School student has a pastoral care teacher. While all teachers look out for the needs of Middle school students, the pastoral care teacher for each child has the prime responsibility.

The pastoral care teacher will lead devotions with their students each day, will write the developmental profile for school reports, is responsible for guiding the students in weekly advocacy classes, and is the first person to contact if your child is facing challenges at school. In Middle School, the pastoral care teacher also takes students for Cultural Studies classes.

Advocacy classes give an opportunity for teachers to work with students in their understanding of themselves as learners, while also including time for the class to develop and grow as a learning community. Students participate in goal setting and reviewing, developing healthy organisational habits, learning study skills, one-on-one catch ups with the teacher, team building exercises, reflections on learning and growth, understanding individual learning preferences and habits, and suggesting improvements or changes to

the Middle School.

As the primary liaison between the school and home, pastoral care teachers will seek to contact parents with both ‘good news’ stories, as well any issues that may arise concerning their child. Similarly, we encourage parents to contact the pastoral care teacher first with any issues. If an issue/query concerns a specific subject area, parents are encouraged to contact the relevant teacher directly. Email addresses are provided in this handbook.

In most cases, contact with the relevant teacher will clear up any concerns. However, in the situation where an issue has not been dealt with to your satisfaction, please contact the Middle School Coordinator.

We encourage parents to remember to work with us! If your child tells you something about school that concerns you – socially, academically, in the classroom or anything else, please talk to us to get clarification, additional information and to partner with us in exploring solutions for your child’s concerns.



A Community of Learners

Restorative Practice & Discipline

In the MECS Middle School, our approach to discipline follows the principles of Restorative Practice. This approach recognises and helps students understand that relationships are damaged when behaviour goes wrong, or poor choices are made.

MECS Middle School students are continuing to learn how 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 their 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. Discipline incidents that centre around a breakdown of relationship are approached by having a 'Restorative chat' using the following four 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.

Where necessary, parents will be 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.

Within classrooms, teachers outline behavioural expectations at the beginning of each year. Students who choose not to follow these guidelines can expect to be reprimanded, moved, and if these interventions fail to result in improved behaviour, a lunchtime detention will be issued. Detentions may also be given for dress code infringements, failure to abide by school rules, or incomplete homework. Parents are encouraged to inform teachers via email if there are legitimate reasons why a student has not met homework expectations.



Living in Community

For all communities, there are ground-rules or guidelines, to ensure there is clear direction of expectations. The MECS Middle School community is no different. While most of the following rules are directed to students, it is important that parents understand what is expected of their children at school.

ATTENDANCE

For late arrivals, students must report to the main office to sign in. Administration staff will ensure the late arrival is immediately reflected on the student's class roll. Any early departure from school requires the parent/guardian to sign the student out via the front office. A note/email should be provided to inform staff of reasons for early departure or arranged via office staff.

MOBILE PHONE USE

Students are not allowed to use or charge their mobile phone at school during school hours (8:45am–3:30pm) without teacher permission. Students

found using their phone without express permission can expect to have it confiscated and will be issued with a lunchtime detention. The student can collect their phone from the main office at the end of the day.

INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

MECS does not condone inappropriate language such as bullying or swearing. If your child is coming home reporting that offensive language is being used in the classroom or the playground, please contact their pastoral care teacher as a matter of urgency.

OUT-OF-BOUNDS

If a student is discovered outside of the designated areas of the school, they will be issued with a lunchtime detention. Each classroom has a map of out-of-bounds areas. Middle School students are not permitted to enter the Primary School or Senior School at any time or access the Understorey without teacher supervision. Students are also not allowed to access classrooms at recess or lunchtime without direct teacher supervision.

PORTABLE SPEAKERS & HEADPHONES

As with phone use, students are not allowed to play music at school (either through headphones or speakers) without express teacher permission. If a student does not follow these expectations, they will be issued with a lunchtime detention. Generally, students will not be permitted to listen to music with their headphones. Firstly, it does not allow students to learn how to work in environments where there may be some distractions. Secondly, it can have a negative impact on the development of a positive, co-operative class culture. In some circumstances, such as when directed by Education Support, students may be given permission.

CHEWING GUM

Students are not permitted to chew gum on the school premises or on any school event, such as camps, excursions and sports days. If a student is found chewing gum, they will be asked to dispose of the gum in a bin, and issued with a lunchtime detention.



A Community of Learners

Dress code

The dress code is intended to allow students guided freedom and the opportunity to demonstrate responsibility in making sensible and considerate choices.

Student dress should:

- support the central function of the school – learning;
- be appropriate and comfortable for a school setting;
- support the health and safety of students, including abiding by sun-smart and hat policies;
- be neat, modest, clean and in good repair.

Student dress should meet the following requirements:

TOPS

- No underwear showing/not see through;
- No exposed midriff;
- No cleavage;
- No exposed underarm;
- Sleeves need to fully cover the shoulder and have underarm seam.

SKIRTS & DRESSES

- Secondary School - Skirts/dresses must at least come to the tips of fingers when standing, arms straight and hands on thighs;
- The top of the dress (bodice) must meet the requirements for 'TOPS', or another top must be worn to ensure compliance.

SHORTS, TROUSERS, & JEANS

- Shorts must come to the tips of fingers when standing, arms straight and hands on thighs
- All long pants - no backside or underwear exposure at any time;
- Leggings: only MECS Schoolwear leggings are permitted without outer garments. All other brand/styles of leggings must be worn with dresses/skirts/skorts/shorts (except for Physical Education – see note on the following page)**;
- No ripped clothing.

HATS

- In Terms 1 & 4, students must have hats with them at all times, and on their heads when not under the roof-covered ways;
- Appropriate and recommended hats are available from the office. Alternative hats may be worn but must have a full brim of 6cms.



Dress code

JEWELLERY & PIERCING

- Secondary School – two pairs of studs or sleepers (maximum 2 cm drop), no bracelets or anklets;
- No other facial jewellery in Middle School. Senior School - one discrete facial piercing is permitted. All other jewellery must be removed (NOT covered);
- Rings: Secondary School – safe and subtle, maximum of 2;
- Necklaces should be single, subtle and safe (but are not allowed in Physical Education, Manual Arts or Science Labs).

HAIR

- Should not be extreme and must be within range of natural hair colours;
- Should not cover eyes;
- Secondary School - hair may be worn down, except for subjects where it might pose a risk to safety (e.g. Physical Education, Science Labs, Manual Arts, Cooking classes etc). All students who have hair that is shoulder length or longer need to have a hair tie with them to enable them to tie it back when required.

FOOTWEAR

- Must be safe and provide good support;
- Must have enclosed toe and secured heel (when on tiptoes, the heel stays on);
- No Ugg boots, slippers, thongs, sandals or flimsy slip-on shoes.

MAKE-UP

- Secondary School – subtle make-up appropriate for school. No extra application during the day;
- No fake nails permitted.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION & SPORT

- Runners (or other appropriate footwear) must be worn;
- Shorts should be no shorter than the thumb tip when standing (hands by sides);
- Years 7 – 10: black shorts/black track suit pants (no exposed zips or

buttons), MECS sport top. No jeans. All leggings (including other brands/styles) are permitted without outer garments during PE/Sport lessons only. MECS Schoolwear leggings are however the preferred option (by the end of 2019 only MECS leggings will be permitted to be worn on their own for Years 7-12);

- MECS Sporting Events - Students are encouraged to dress in the colour of their tribe for these events;
- Interschool Sporting Events - All students competing in interschool activities must wear the MECS sport top. MECS Schoolwear leggings, shorts and skorts are also recommended.

** All schoolwear options bearing the MECS logo are compliant with this dress code, and are available for purchase. Please ask at the office for more information.





A Program for Learning

A Program for Learning

A Biblical Approach

At MECS, we believe that we live out of the biblical story. When we present a unit or topic, we seek to understand how our area of learning fits within God's story, and how God's story speaks into our topic. We acknowledge first and foremost that this world belongs to God - he created it and continues to sustain it.

When developing curriculum, MECS teachers not only consider the topic in relation to the biblical story, but also our faithful responses to the learning of the unit. *While many educational approaches can focus on 'head' learning, MECS recognises that education is for the formation of the whole person.* This includes the intellectual, but also the emotional, physical, social, and spiritual aspects of our students. We desire to see our students grow in wisdom and character. We use *Threads* to help shape possible responses that relate to the head, heart and hand.

The *Threads* include:

- Loving God
- Building Community
- Caretaking Earth
- Celebrating Life
- Challenging Distortions
- Discovering Patterns
- Embracing Diversity
- Expressing Words
- Getting Wisdom
- Imagining Innovations
- Imitating Humility
- Overcoming Setbacks
- Pondering Creation
- Practising Hospitality
- Pursuing Peace
- Reflecting Creativity
- Relishing Play
- Seeking Justice
- Shaping Culture
- Showing Mercy
- Transforming Thinking
- Understanding Vocation
- Unwrapping Gifts



A Program for Learning

Term Tasters and Electives

As students progress through the Middle School, we acknowledge that they are of an age when they are beginning to make decisions regarding future pathways. The subject selections are designed to provide students with a range of learning opportunities.

In Years 7 and 8, all students participate in Term Tasters. These are smaller classes that rotate through four learning areas of a term's duration. They include more 'hands on' opportunities. While offerings change from year to year, they usually cover areas such as photography, coding, gardening, cooking, dance, and rock-climbing.

In Year 9, students have two sets of electives. For the first selection, students will choose two electives for one semester each. These elective subjects cover areas such as cooking, song-writing/band, drama, and fine art. Their second selection is shared with Year 10 students and includes manual arts, fine arts, media, dance, music, and Indonesian.

Special Week and Wonder Days

Special Week...

MECS has a long tradition of running an exciting program known as Special Week. During this week, held in mid Term 3, the 'normal' curriculum is set aside, and a special focus takes place. In Year 7, the students investigate Medieval Europe. In Year 8, the focus is on raising awareness of Global issues. Finally, the Year 9s learn about running a business enterprise in *Industry Week*. The highlight of the week is the Showcase Evening, where family and friends are invited to come and share in the learning, while buying goodies and tasting delights from the Year 9 market.

Wonder Days ...

These two days, held early in Term 2, are an opportunity for students to explore areas under the STEAM umbrella - Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics. Students will choose the activity(s) in which they will participate over the days. Activities will vary each year, but in previous years, these groups have focussed on flight, robotics, coding, forensics, geometric art, marble runs, game theory, mythbusters, fisheries (an overnight trip to Snobb's Creek), bridge engineering, the solar system, Lego systems, and 3D design utilising our 3D printer.

Examinations

At MECS, we conduct examinations for English, Mathematics and Science in the last week of Term 3. By conducting examinations at this time, we have the opportunity to check how much of the curriculum the students understand and can accurately apply, but also affords us the time to rectify any misunderstandings the students may have.

Teachers work with students on developing a repertoire of revision techniques to help them properly prepare for examinations. These skills will continue to hold students in good stead as they progress through the Secondary school. Each examination covers all of the material that has been covered in the subject for the year to date.

In Year 7, the purpose is to give students an experience of both preparing for and sitting examinations. The grade they attain will not appear on the student's report. In Years 8 & 9, the grade will appear on the student's report.



Victorian Curriculum

Our curriculum is based on the Victorian Curriculum (<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au>). Teachers carefully discern and interpret the formal curricula and frame it for their own settings and the needs of the individual learners.

The Victorian Curriculum is the state's formulation of the Australian Curriculum. These frameworks provide curriculum developers with the content and achievement standards that learners should know and attain as they progress through the school.

The Timetable

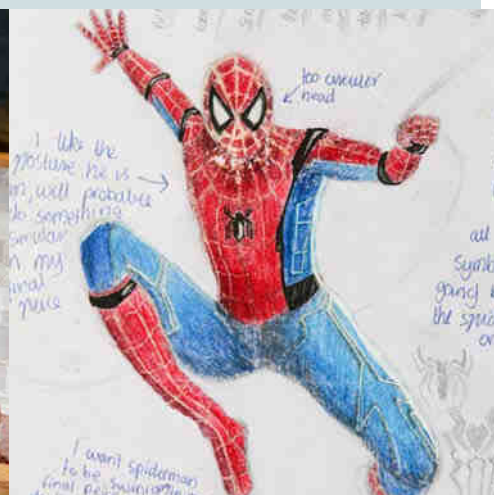
The school day is made up of eight 40-minute lessons. The lessons are broken down as follows:

Devotions	8:50-9:00
Lesson 1:	9:00-9:40
Lesson 2:	9:40-10:20
Lesson 3:	10:20-11:00
Recess	11:00-11:25
Lesson 4:	11:25-12:05
Lesson 5:	12:05-12:45
Lunch	12:45-1:30
Lesson 6:	1:30-2:10
Lesson 7:	2:10-2:50
Lesson 8:	2:50-3:30

The forty lessons of the week are distributed as follows:

Subject	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9
English	5	5	6
Mathematics	5	5	6
Science	3	3	4
Cultural Studies*	8	8	11
Health	2	2	2
Scripture	1	1	1
Physical Education	2	2	2
Sport	2	2	2
Art	3	3	elec
Indonesian	2	2	elec
Music	2	2	elec
Drama	2	2	elec
Term Tasters	2	2	-
Electives 9	-	-	2
Electives 9/10	-	-	3
Advocacy	1	1	1

* Cultural Studies includes History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, and Economics. In Year 9, this subject is covered in Open Village.



A Program for Learning

Homework Guidelines

It seems everyone has an opinion on homework. While some prefer students do all their work at school and leave home time for other things, others prefer the consolidation, extension, and growth of study habits that homework provides. Whatever our opinion, research continues to support the importance of homework in the development of students as effective life-long learners, particularly at the Middle and Senior school years.

The quality of homework tasks set plays a significant role in its usefulness. Homework should be developmentally appropriate, related to class work, and should foster effective study habits. The setting of homework should also take into account the need for a balanced lifestyle in our students. It should not 'take over' home life in place of family time, sports and recreation, employment, and church/youth group activities.

In the Middle school years, we encourage students to spend at least 40 minutes each afternoon/evening dedicated to homework or study. This time should increase over the years as they head into Senior School.

Teachers will support learners by:

- Providing homework tasks with purpose and clear instructions;
- Providing students with enough time to complete homework, including the consideration of home obligations and extracurricular activities;
- Ensuring students have the necessary resources and skills to complete homework tasks;
- Ensuring homework can be completed with minimum to no assistance;
- Assessing homework and providing timely and practical feedback and support;
- Setting varied, challenging and meaningful tasks related to class work to suit the students' learning needs;
- Equipping students with study skills so they are better prepared for independent study;
- Helping students develop organisational and time-management skills.

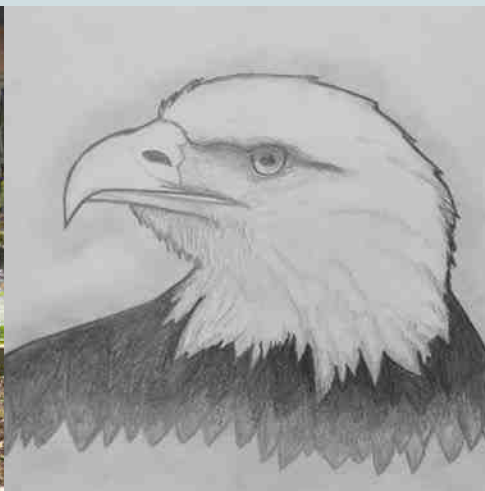
Parents/care-givers will support learners by:

- Speaking positively about school subjects even if they were a challenge to you;
- Encouraging a growth mindset in learning – praising effort rather than ability;

- Ensuring there is a balance between the time spent on homework and family time/recreational activities;
- Communicating to teachers if there are any concerns related to homework;
- Encouraging effective time management – with the use of printed or online diaries/calendars;
- Providing an area that has good light, is quiet and free from distraction for your child to do their homework;
- Linking homework and other learning activities to the family's culture, history and language, linking with relevant services, clubs, associations and community groups.

What students can do when there is no assigned homework...

- Read – it does not need to be a school novel or text;
- Practise spelling words;
- Practise mathematics skills;
- Practise physical education skills;
- Practise drawing skills;
- Play a musical instrument;
- Write a creative piece;
- Have a discussion with parents around an article in the newspaper/online;
- Further research into a topic they are studying or simply an area of interest.



Schoolbox

Schoolbox is the learning management system utilised at MECS. This online portal allows your child to see and interact with content that their teacher has made available to them. Many teachers are using Schoolbox to post assignment details, PowerPoint slides, lesson notes, and to enable online homework submission; students are able to use Schoolbox to submit their completed work and receive feedback from teachers.

Schoolbox is relatively new to MECS. Teachers continue to be trained and equipped to make the best use of this resource, including getting their subject courses online (with some exceptions for hands-on/practical subjects). At some point in 2019, we hope to open the parent portal component of this system, which allows parents to view the assignment feedback/assessment results that their child is receiving and be better informed of their progress.

Technology

In the MECS Middle School, each year level has a set of laptops for the students. These laptops are the property of the school, and are serviced and maintained by MECS IT staff. As students head into the Senior School, they are able to choose to bring their own device (BYOD) or use the laptops available.

MECS does not have stand-alone ICT classes. The ICT components of the Victorian Curriculum are integrated throughout the subjects undertaken in Middle School.

At times throughout the year, Middle School students will head over to the Yarra Ranges Tech School (YRTS) in Lilydale. MECS is a partner school of YRTS and is able to utilise the vast array of state-of-the-art technical equipment as part of the Project Challenges. These projects are designed to develop high-level transformative skills in students, such as:

- communication
- global citizenship
- teamwork
- adaptability and agility
- leadership
- critical thinking
- problem solving
- creativity and innovation
- self-management

Mathematics in the Middle School

Middle School mathematics classes are mostly single streamed classes. We acknowledge academic research which has found that streaming is detrimental to the majority of mathematics students, particularly in the Primary and Middle School years. For one class each week, students participate in Flexi-maths, which is streamed topic-based mathematical instruction. This is an opportunity for students to choose from three classes - further tutoring, consolidation of the concepts, or extension and enrichment.

Students who require additional mathematical support may be identified as benefitting from our transition program - Jenga Mathematics. Furthermore, learning assistants are often timetabled to support students in mathematics classes.

Students who require extension and enrichment will continue to be provided extended challenges in their regular classes. They are also able to participate in enrichment Flexi-maths, Critical thinking (STEAM) classes, the Australian Mathematics competition, and special enrichment days focussed on mathematics or STEAM (such as the Wonder Days).



A Program for Learning

Year 9 Open Village

Education is much more than the passing on of knowledge – it is about helping the students become well rounded, life-long learners. Each student is unique and the Year 9 Open Village gives students the opportunity to explore who they are and how they learn best in an innovative and challenging environment.

Throughout Year 9 students are encouraged to consider the way they work, think, communicate and behave. The students work with teachers to set realistic and challenging goals that will help them target specific areas that need further improvement. The input of teacher, students and parents ensure the goals are challenging but not overwhelming.

The Year 9 Open Village program incorporates the Cultural Studies components of the curriculum, covering History, Geography, Economics, and Civics and Citizenship. There are 11 lessons spent in the Open Village each week.

A variety of *immersion experiences* are used to introduce each new area of study. These may be an activity, an excursion, a movie or other experience designed to spark curiosity and help a student engage with the curriculum. These experiences generally create a high level of enthusiasm and help the student to identify an area they would like to study further. Many immersion experiences are debriefed in small groups where students have the opportunity to ask questions and unpack the issues raised with other students and a teacher. Students are encouraged to ask questions and consider what a Christian response to the issues might be.

Once the student has chosen what interests them, they work closely with a teacher to develop a project. This process is aided by a project proposal sheet, helping the student to consider what questions they are trying to answer, who their target audience is, what form the project should take, how it will challenge the student, and how it can be broken down into manageable steps.

Each term there is at least one compulsory task for students to complete while other projects are negotiated with a teacher. Every compulsory project is designed to

challenge students in a different way. Through such projects the students are given opportunities to develop and grow in a variety of areas. Effective collaboration with others, pulling their weight in a team situation, managing time well, striving for accuracy and precision are just a few of these and each area has been identified as being an important skill for ensuring ongoing success.

Each student has a homegroup teacher who tracks their progress and they also have access to a whole team of teachers they can work alongside.

Seminars are regularly used to give the students targeted instruction on a specific topic. These are held in small groups and organised to repeat a number of times in the week so that the students can select when they attend.

Through the intentional design of Open Village the students are drawn into a rich opportunity to develop essential skills for life and learning both inside and outside the school environment. It is our hope that this program will help equip students to become transforming agents for positive change in the society in which they live.



Middle School Camping Program

Camps and other ‘out-of-classroom’ experiences are an important part of the educational program at MECS. Each camp is an extension of the work done in class and is not regarded as an ‘optional extra’. Consequently, students at MECS are required to attend camps just like they are required to attend school each day.

Camps are a priority because of the way they enhance the learning of our students. We feel it is valuable for students to not only learn about various aspects of God’s creation but also to experience them first hand. Learning is greatly enriched by such experiences and it has greater relevance. The whole range of the senses are engaged in this kind of learning.

Camps allow staff and students to respond more creatively to learning situations and to think ‘outside the box’. They provide opportunities for students to ‘shine’ and demonstrate their God-given gifts in ways that do not readily occur within the general classroom.

Camps are also important for:

- Developing important life skills such as independence, perseverance and resilience;
- Developing interpersonal skills;
- Developing problem-solving skills;
- Fostering community;
- Encouraging students to take on new responsibilities;
- Leading them to pursue appropriate behaviour in new situations be it public places, meeting other adults, taking on duty group responsibilities or sharing a tent/ cabin.

In Middle School, the range of camps are as follows:

Year 7

- Clifford Park Camp (3 days, Term 1, tents)
- Inverloch Camp (5 days, Term 4, tents)

Year 8

- Man Camp (4 days, Term 1, tents)
- Inspiring Girls Camp (4 days, Term 1, rooms)
- Wilsons Prom Camp (5 days, Term 4, tents)

Year 9

- City Camp (5 days, Term 1, rooms)
- Canberra Camp (6 days, Term 4, rooms)

Please note that all Years 7-9 camps are held in the same week during Terms 1 and 4, and that the cost of the camps are included in school fees.

Students are required to bring the following camping equipment to Year 7 and Year 8 camps:

- Good quality sleeping bag
- Sleeping mat (closed cell foam) or Lilo
- Four-to-six man tents are also needed. These are shared between 4 to 5 students.

Additional camping equipment is required for the Wilsons Prom Camp in Year 8:

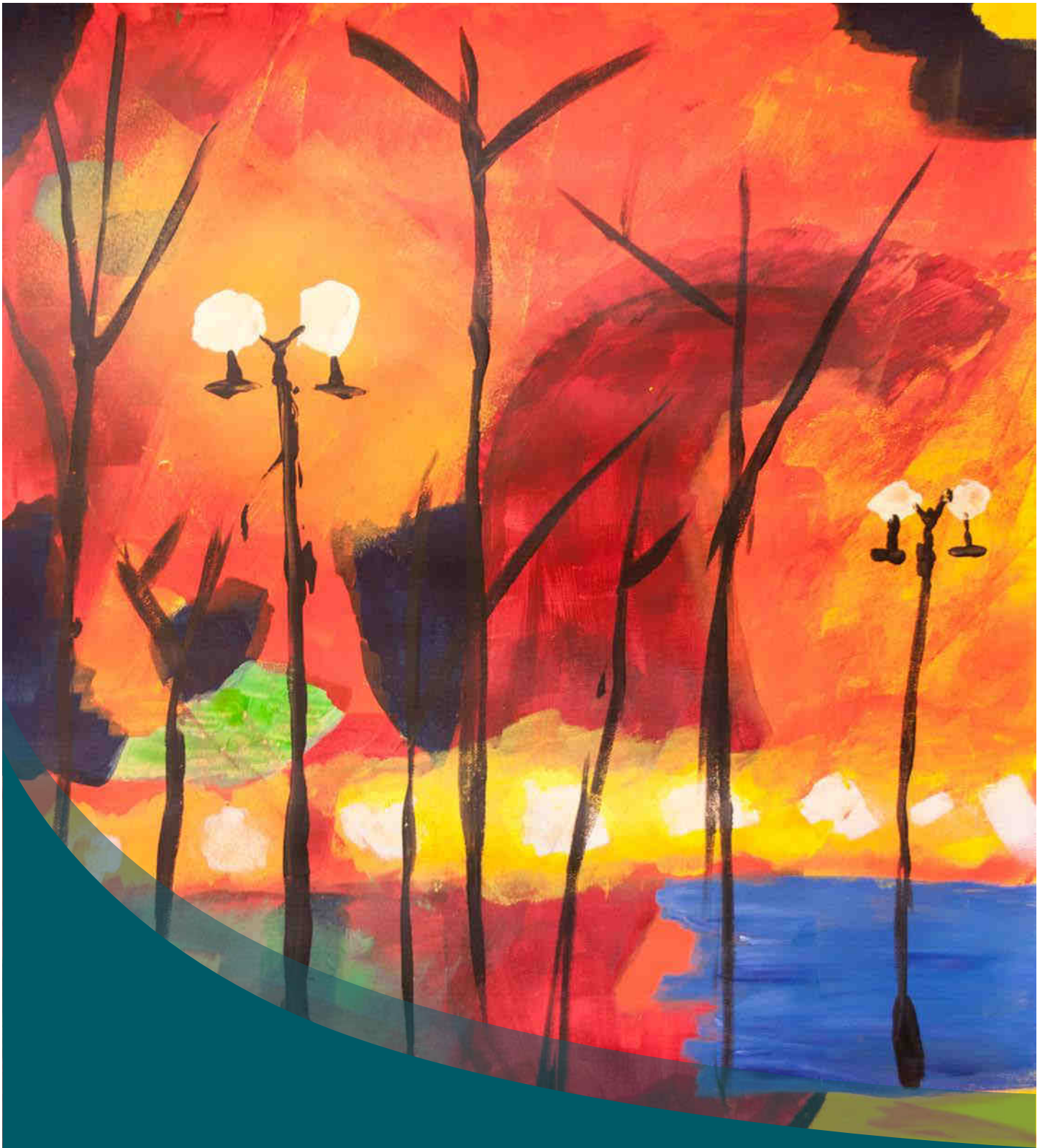
- Hiking shoes
- Hiking pack (approx. 50–70L), with no exposed frames
- Waterproof cover for hiking pack
- Lightweight/hiking sleeping mat
- Hiking Tent – shared 1 between 2 people
- Trangia – shared 1 between 2 people
- Thermal long sleeve top – depending on which hike your child is assigned to.

Some of this hiking equipment can be easily hired or borrowed closer to the camp.

Whether your child is required to provide a tent and/or Trangia is determined closer to the camp.

Camp notices are sent out at the beginning of Terms 1 and 4, and a parent information evening is held in Term 3 for the Wilsons Prom camp.





An Opportunity for Growth

An Opportunity for Growth

Enrichment and Support

During the Middle School years, the rate of students' learning and growth can vary significantly. Education Support in the Middle School recognises the unique challenges of these years, and consequently, the support looks quite different to what happens in our primary section.

Getting off to a good start ...

Mid-way through Year 6, planning for a successful transition begins.

- *Student Support Group meetings* – Middle School Education Support staff attend these in Term 3, for existing students.
- *Student Summary Document* - Parents, teachers and the students themselves collaborate to develop a simple one-page document in Term 4. This acts as a 'voice' for students who would like their new teachers to know about their skills and interests, and what works best (and what is not helpful!) for them as learners.
- Education Support staff are present at the Year 7 Family Information evening and the Year 7 Orientation Day. A further student visit before Term 1 may

occur, perhaps to choose a locker, identify which table is theirs, and anything else that will help calm nerves.

During the journey ...

Within the Middle School years, the Education Support team offers a range of options to build on student learning.

- Jenga and Jenga 3D are programs for students who require additional support in their learning, or who require extension and enrichment in particular subject areas (for more information about the Jenga and Jenga 3D programs, see p30).
- One-to-one withdrawal programs are offered to individual students who prefer this mode of support, whilst other students prefer to remain in the classroom and work with a learning assistant either singly or with a small group of students.

Here at MECS we celebrate the 'different kinds of normal.' We nurture diversity and shape education to allow everyone to experience the rich joy of learning well.



An Opportunity for Growth

Jenga - Building On

Jenga is a Swahili word meaning 'build.' In the Jenga Program we seek to build on student strengths, build their confidence in their abilities, and build enjoyment and satisfaction with their schooling.

Complementing current Educational Support practices, this program offers a carefully designed and tailored individual plan for learning that identifies optimal conditions for each participating student. This considers **what** is learned, **how** the learning and teaching occurs, and even **where** the sessions are held.

Mathematics and/or English classes become Jenga Mathematics and Jenga English. The same curriculum units are taught, albeit with adjustments and modifications according to the individual student's requirements.

A feature of the program is the Off Campus Day (OCD) each week, where students have a chance to: visit various industries, enjoy different leisure opportunities, participate in voluntary programs and pursue individual interests and passions.

'Building on' also provides opportunities through our Jenga 3D (Deepen, Dream, Design) Enrichment program. These include opportunities such as:

- participation in the *Tournament of Minds* competition;
- enrichment classes open to Middle School students which focus on critical thinking in Literacy and STEAM;
- a Mathematics enrichment day for all Middle School students.

At the heart of all 'building on' is a deep sense of hope and anticipation and an expectation that it will enrich and inform the current situation. In Jenga, the programs are designed to enrich the development of the whole person: intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, 'formation' of character and the learning of wisdom.

Lunchtime opportunities

As a way of supporting relationship building, meeting the needs of our students and promoting a positive learning culture, the Middle School has a wonderful array of Lunchtime opportunities in which students can be involved.

While these change from year to year, they may include:

- Japanese Club
- Homework Club
- Art Room 'Open House'
- Wrestling
- Lifting Lunch Club
- Gymnasium access (indoor sports facilities)
- Public speaking/Drama
- Dance club
- Lego Club
- Student Leadership
- Library activities or quiet reading
- Secondary band



Sporting programs

The sporting program at MECS continues to go from strength to strength with exciting new developments in 2019.

The MECS Sport Academy will be open to keen students who desire to improve their fitness and skills. Each week, the academy will host a before-school fitness session, and an after-school session where students can choose to focus on skill development in either Soccer or Netball. While still in the developmental stages, the Academy has the potential for students to participate in relevant tournaments.

In the regular sports program, students have the opportunity to represent MECS at interschool sports. These include individual sports such as swimming, athletics and cross-country; as well as the team sports of Netball, Basketball, Futsal, and Volleyball/Badminton. In 2019, expert coaches in these sports will work with MECS teachers to bring further depth to the sports program.

Keen students should keep an eye out for Tribal challenges held at lunchtimes.

Performing Arts

Students gifted or interested in the areas of performing arts have a number of different opportunities to develop their skills, including our instrumental program, our band and ensemble opportunities, and our biennial Secondary musical/drama production.

Our **Instrumental program** at MECS includes a team of tutors providing lessons in a range of instruments. At recitals, our community of parents, friends, staff and students gather to support our soloists and ensembles from throughout the school.

Every second year the Secondary School coordinates and performs a **Production** to the school community. All Secondary students are invited to take part with auditions held for the main roles. The most recent production (2018) showcased fabulous dramatic, musical, and dancing talent in the adapted Shakespeare play, 'A Mid-Semester Night's Dream.'

Middle School students are invited to join the **Secondary band**. Rehearsals occur during lunchtimes, and the band performs in assemblies, productions, musical evenings and community events such as Open Days.

Student Leadership

The Secondary School has a Student Leadership program where students can build their leadership skills, be mentored in their role as a representative of the student body, and take an active part in a range of events and initiatives in the life of the school.

Open to all students (either by self-appointment or staff encouragement), the student leadership team is a dedicated group of students who have a passion and desire to actively contribute to the culture of the MECS Secondary school, represent their peers and serve God and the wider school community with their gifts.

Mentored by the Secondary Assistant Principal, students meet weekly during the school term to learn 'on the job' as they plan and run a range of initiatives and events throughout the school.

Students are further supported and equipped through training days, networking, camps and other community events.





A Celebration of Achievement

A Celebration of Achievement

Celebrating the diversity of our students

"God's creation consists of diversity in unity. God delights in variety and differences. Human beings, too, are diverse in their abilities, giftings, backgrounds, interests, but all are loved and valued by the Creator and are an integral part of the body of Christ. While uniformity and standardisation tend to be rewarded in our society, MECS will nurture differences and allow diversity to flourish. Differently abled students bless the community and provide opportunities for us to serve each other."

*Transformational Education,
(2014, MECS, p43)*

One of the facets of Transformational Education is 'Oriented for students.' This approach recognises that teachers treat each learner as a unique individual, made in God's image, known to him by name and nature, gifted specifically by him and responsible directly in service to him. As teachers we work with the very crown of God's creation - the bearers of his image (MECS, 2014, p121).

All of our students are different and demonstrate their learning in different ways. At MECS, we believe that the learning of our students is broad, dynamic, and full of variety. It cannot simply be recognised in a neatly packaged written report distributed twice a year.

There are a lot of ways to celebrate, observe and recognise the learning of our students. Some of these ways are structured and formal, such as parent-teacher meetings and written reports. Many other ways are less formal, but just as significant in showcasing student learning,

growth and achievement. These include opportunities for parents to come and see the students in action at sports days, showcase evenings, recitals, productions, community events and whole-school assemblies. Teachers are more and more placing an emphasis on the 'audience' of student work, so that student efforts have authenticity and meaning and do not simply fill recycling bins at the end of each year.

In inviting family and friends to 'come and see' the exciting learning that takes place at MECS, we celebrate our wider 'relational community.' Together, we worship the Creator God, whose creativity our students are reflecting.



A Celebration of Achievement

Reports

Student achievement is graded according to the year-level standards expected at the time of the report. While these standards are determined by MECS, they are heavily influenced by the mandated National Curriculum.

We grade on a 5-point scale, using the letters H, D, R, E, St. The following descriptions should provide you with more clarity:

H - *Highly competent and confident*: the student demonstrates that they are well above the expected standard at this point in time. The student makes connections beyond what is expected and innovates on learnt material. They are at least 6-12 months ahead of what is expected of them.

D - *Displays sound understanding*: the student consistently achieves the standards in this area at this time. They regularly demonstrate their understandings of learnt material in a range of ways. They are working at the expected level.

R - *Reasonable grasp in most areas*: the student is not consistently achieving the standards in this area. Most of the time the student demonstrates understanding. They may not know or understand all concepts. They may not consistently achieve the level required across all areas.

E - *Experiencing some difficulty*: the student requires support and assistance to complete tasks. They are not able to achieve the standard level. They display gaps in their understanding of the required area of study that need attention. The student is at least 6 months behind expected standards.

St - *Struggles excessively*: the student requires ongoing intervention and support in the form of consistent one-on-one help and guidance, and other support mechanisms. The student is well below the expected level at this point in time.

Other grades include S or N (Satisfactory or Non-Satisfactory), or percentages for an assessment task. If you are confused or uncertain about any of the results or grades on your child's reports, please do not hesitate to seek out teacher(s) for clarification.

Parent-Teacher Meetings

Parent-teacher meetings happen twice a year – generally towards the end of Terms 1 and 3. They are an excellent opportunity to get a general overview of your child's progress, find ways you can support them at home, and possibly address any minor concerns that have arisen.

The meetings are held over two afternoons/evenings (4-9pm) in the MECS gymnasium and are of 7 or 8 minutes duration. Parents will be sent a notice home earlier in the term explaining the booking process using Parent Teacher Online (PTO). Parents are encouraged to see as many of their child's teachers as possible, and should include their child's Cultural Studies teacher who is also their pastoral care teacher.

Parent-teacher meetings are not designed for more serious concerns to be tackled. If this is required, please arrange to meet with the relevant teacher at another time.



Support & Resources

Learning on show

You will be provided with many opportunities to come and see student learning at MECS. Keep an eye out for:

- **Middle School Special Week Showcase evening** - This is a highlight of the Middle School year. It is held on the Thursday evening of Special Week in mid Term 3.
- **Music recitals** - These are held throughout the year. Make sure to read the school newsletter for details of upcoming events.
- **Secondary Production** - The next production is to be held in 2020 towards the end of Term 3.
- **The Middle School led Whole-School assembly** - Whole school assemblies focus on the learning highlights of each section of the school. The Middle School typically host this assembly early in Term 3.
- **Sports Days** - Parents and friends are welcome to come and cheer on students at swimming, athletics and cross country carnivals.

The task of parenting, educating and advocating for teenagers is full of moments of joy, fun and reward. These young people have an amazing purpose in God's unfolding plan, and what a pleasure it is to walk alongside them and assist them in discovering their uniqueness. However, knowing exactly how to support our teenagers can sometimes be an overwhelming and daunting task.

Presented here is a list of resources that support parents in navigating their child's adolescent years:

Websites:

- <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting>
- andrewfuller.com.au
- headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/life-issues
- cybersafetysolutions.com.au/session-for-parents

Books for assisting young people navigate their teenage years:

- *Beyond This Moment* - by speaker and ex-MECS student Nathan 'Dubby' Want
- *Growing Up By the Book* by Patricia Weerakoon
- *Sex's Texts & Selfies* by cybersafety guru, Susan McLean
- *Teen Talk (Collection)* by Sharon Witt (MECS Middle School Teacher)
- *Surviving Adolescents 2.0, Beyond Cyberbullying, Real Wired Child and Strictly Parenting* by Michael Carr-Gregg

Books for assisting teenagers as learners:

- *Mindset* by Carol Dweck
- *Smart but Scattered Teens: The "Executive Skills" Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential* by Colin Guare, Peg Dawson, and Richard Guare
- *The Crumpled Paper Was Due Last Week: Helping Disorganised and Distracted Boys Succeed in School and Life* by Ana Homayoun

Conferences:

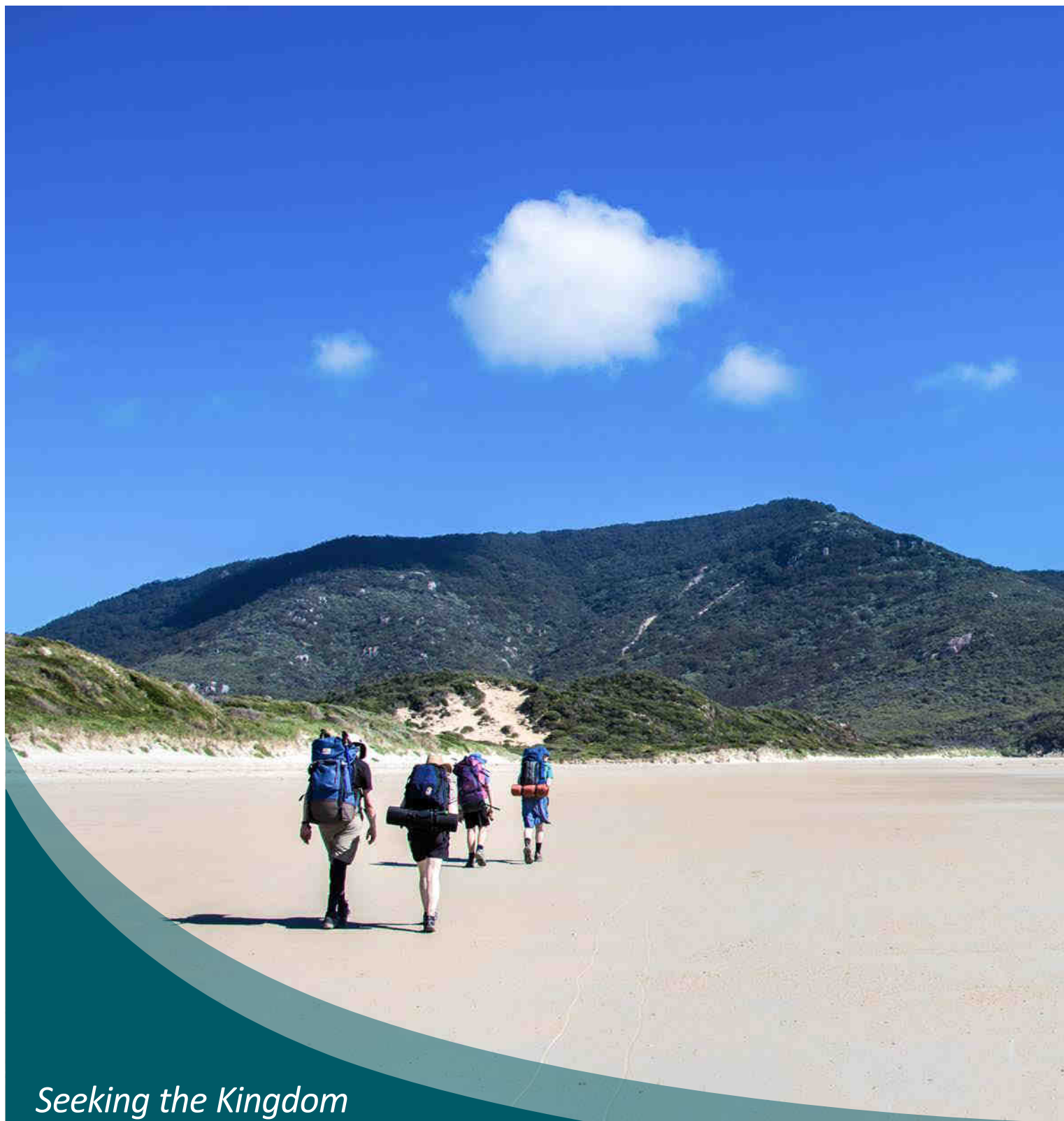
- resilientkidsconference.com.au - Initially launched by Sharon Witt, this yearly conference includes a line-up of experts all focussed on assisting parents, educators and professionals to improve the resilience of our children and young people.

I look forward to journeying with you throughout your child's secondary years of schooling. What a joy it is to partner together to encourage and educate our young people.



Mrs Karissa Esselbrugge
Assistant Principal - Secondary





Seeking the Kingdom of God in Education

MECS Vision

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

MECS Mission



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