

## St Brendan's Primary School, Dunnstown Closing Speech 25<sup>th</sup> Nov 2023

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CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION  
LIMITED



CATHOLIC EDUCATION BALLARAT

Ladies and gentlemen, grandparents, parents, friends, current and past students, and staff of St. Brendan's Primary School, today marks a bittersweet moment as we commemorate the closing of a parish school that has been a cornerstone of Catholic education for over 160 years. Today also allows us to celebrate the significant legacy that St. Brendan's leaves for us as individuals, our community, and the Diocese.

Established in 1859, St. Brendan's has been integral to this community, shaping minds and touching hearts for generations – just as we have heard from our previous speakers.

I was surprised and excited when researching the history of the school, to find my own family connection to St Brendan's. My mum's cousins, the Flynn family, were on the school roll here in the 1930's.

The journey of St. Brendan's has been remarkable, navigating from humble beginnings in a building in poor condition with Miss Harrington as the first principal. Through adversities, including the first inspector's reports, which followed a school visit on 7 May 1860, Inspector Geary passed some harsh comments which typified the stereotyped image of Irish immigrants at that time and included the following:

*Visited the RC school at Warrenheip. The children know nothing. The schoolroom is dirty and ill-provided... A high bench at which only four can write at once is the only writing accommodation...there are but three slates, two pencils and a few ragged books among 26 children.*

*During the time of inspections, pigs, dogs, and fowls seemed to feel it incumbent in their conscience to make their presence felt.... The teacher displayed a woeful amount of ignorance. The building is not suitable for a public school; it is a weatherboard hut with a bark roof and the site is low and damp.*

*As partners in  
Catholic education  
and open to God's presence,  
we pursue fullness of life for all.*

The same Inspector returned in November of 1860, but little had changed in his report:

*Built of pailings, 18' x 12'. A miserable affair. The children are very dirty. Hardly any books, and no blackboard.*

*I bet Miss Harrington was not too excited about Inspector Geary's visits!*

Along with the impact of the 1872 Education Act in Victoria and the condemning of the school building in 1913, the school persevered, reliant on the support of the local Catholic parish community. Despite challenges such as the withdrawal of government funding for 90 years, the dedication of various teachers and religious orders who taught in the school under the leadership of successive parish priests, ensured the school's continued on.

From the Josephite Sisters, the Presentation Sisters to the Sisters of Mercy and various school name changes over the years... St Brendan's, St Mary's, Our Lady of Fatima and back to St Brendan's ..... the spirit of learning, compassion and community remained unwavering. Now, faced with the reality of closure at the end of this school year, it marks the end of an era in our parish community's story.

The heart-warming and at times challenging story of St. Brendan's is interwoven with the unwavering support of our local Catholic community. Your continuous financial contributions, dedication and practical support established, maintained, and rebuilt the school, on more than one occasion, displaying the profound power of parish community support entrenched in the Catholic faith and always with a strong desire to provide for our local kids.

Acknowledging the countless generations of students who have passed through the school, from the eager and according to Inspector Geary dirty faces of 1859 to the equally eager and according to Inez rarely grubby faces of the current generation, each has woven their unique thread into the parish community's rich tapestry. Their laughter, friendships, lessons learned, and values instilled, have shaped the school's legacy. As we close this chapter, we honour and celebrate every student and staff member, their families and the broader community who made this school a thriving hub of knowledge, growth, and cherished memories. Their legacy lives on in the essence of St. Brendan's.

While bidding farewell to our primary school today, let us carry forward its legacy and cherish the values instilled. The end of this era marks the beginning of a new one..... I am very excited to announce that Damascus College will take over this site in 2024 and use it for specialist programs. The exact details are yet to be worked out, but the good news is that this site will continue to be used for Catholic education into the future.

So to finish off, I gratefully acknowledge the support from generations of local families and St. Brendan's parish community that have enabled the school to endure and prosper for so many years. Thank you, for being a beacon of hope, knowledge, and compassion. For your fierce determination to ensure Catholic education survived here for over 160 years. A truly incredible community achievement.

Well done.

Thank you.