



ST JOSEPH'S SCHOOL

A FRAMEWORK FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLING

DEFINING THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

The teachers in the senior school (Yrs 5, 6 & 7) incorporate Middle Schooling philosophy and perspectives into their planning for student learning.

Students in the middle years of schooling share an array of rapidly changing, diverse and often challenging qualities. Other than infancy, research identifies the ages of approximately 10 to 14 years as a time when children develop and grow more rapidly than during any other developmental stage. These change processes have direct implications for student learning in the middle years of schooling. This is a time when young people make choices that impact significantly on the rest of their lives in a rapidly changing world, where, for example:

- *They have access to extensive and sophisticated informational sources outside of the school and family*
- *They are the target of mass media and advertising*
- *They are participants in a society that has a growing consumer culture*
- *They will participate in a world where the certainty of learning one set of job-related skills for a lifetime of employment will not be sufficient. 1.*

Middle Schooling refers to practices that make formal education responsive and appropriate to the needs of young adolescents engaging them proactively in their learning through appropriate curriculum, pedagogy and school organization. The following aspects of learning are addressed in the Middle School program at St Joseph's.

Curriculum: the teachers from St Joseph's plan cooperatively to develop units of work to provide learning experiences that connect with and are relevant to young adolescent learners and learning processes that explicitly develop reading, writing, critical thinking, decision- making and creativity.

Pedagogy: teachers work as a team to know and understand their students well and use powerful teaching strategies to challenge and extend students in a supportive environment.

School Organisation: The two Middle Schooling groups are each comprised of students from Yrs 5, 6 & 7. The MS groups join together for communal prayer and reflection, class meetings and literacy block. Students from each class form mixed groups to meet their needs in Maths (ability groupings) and to share their skills and experience in Integrated Studies (peer tutoring groupings).

DISTINCTIVE ASPECTS OF ADOLESCENT NEUROLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

- During adolescence the brain undergoes tremendous restructuring and is hot wired for emotion
- Complex interactions of some neurotransmitters impact on adolescent behaviour and can create a predisposition for risk-taking.
- Changes in the frontal lobes and other areas of the brain are influenced by experience thus making the decisions adolescents make extremely important to the development of their neural architecture.
- Adolescents and adults think and react differently.
- Sleep patterns change and therefore must be considered in the day to day routine of school.
- Because the prefrontal cortex is maturing, self-control, judgment and decision-making processes are also maturing.
- There is a growing body of research identifying “gendered” brain differences that have direct implications for learning and behaviour. 2.

VALUES	AREAS OF DISTINCTION	PRACTICES
LEARNER-CENTERED	<p>Embracing an understanding of adolescence and working with adolescents – knowledge of adolescent neurological development.</p> <p>Success for all students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Flexible curriculum that provides learning experiences that connect with and are relevant to students’ personal and social issues. ➤ Teachers negotiate with students topics that are of interest to them to identify appropriate concepts for curriculum planning. ➤ Learning experiences acknowledge students’ prior knowledge and experiences. ➤ Teaching and learning strategies explicitly develop reading, writing, critical thinking, decision-making and creativity. ➤ Students are assisted to develop personal goals and to reflect on their learning.

<p>COLLABORATIVELY ORGANIZED</p>	<p>Developmental differences in this age group are catered for using appropriate pedagogy and negotiated curriculum.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Teachers work as a team and plan an integrated and connected curriculum. ➤ Age appropriate opportunities are provided to link learning with the community. ➤ Students of mixed ages and abilities are grouped across Years 5, 6 & 7. ➤ Teachers have a deep understanding of their students and challenge and extend students within a supportive environment. ➤ Additional support is identified and offered to students who require it through individual and small group support. ➤ The Principal supports professional learning of staff.
<p>OUTCOME BASED</p>	<p>A common curriculum framework and a common pedagogy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Curriculum makes explicit what students need to know and do. ➤ Teachers use learning data to inform planning. ➤ Assessment criteria are negotiated or made explicit at commencement of a phase of learning. ➤ Teachers use BCE Learning Framework and Queensland syllabus documents to plan learning tasks.
<p>FLEXIBLY CONSTRUCTED</p>	<p>Classes are grouped together to form small communities to promote cognitive growth (through increased student motivation) and social growth (through age appropriate pedagogy that also results in reduced antisocial behaviour).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Students are grouped in flexible ways to integrate whole class, small group and individual learning. ➤ Teachers use 'inquiry models' of teaching and learning. ➤ Sustained periods of time ensure students develop quality relationships with a small group of adults. ➤ Timetabling, use of space and resources support students and teachers in the middle school program.
<p>ETHICALLY AWARE</p>	<p>Middle Schooling Framework aligns with School Mission.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Students grow in their understanding of the Church's Social Justice Teachings through their learning experiences. ➤ Justice, respect and concern for the needs of others are reflected in the Middle School Class Covenant. ➤ Assessment and reporting practices are just and equitable.

STRATEGICALLY LINKED	Middle Schooling Framework aligns with school Strategic Renewal Plan and BCE Learning Framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The whole school curriculum is connected across year levels and phases of learning. ➤ Teachers share student learning data within and across phases of schooling. ➤ Students create portfolios of their learning achievement which can be taken to secondary school.
COMMUNITY ORIENTED	A classroom community in which deep relationships are formed between students, teachers, parents and local communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Opportunities are provided for the wider community to be used as a resource in learning. ➤ Students engage in age appropriate social service and community outreach experiences. ➤ The Year Seven Leadership Program communicates a strong expectation for the appropriate behaviour of young leaders in our school community. ➤ The Buddy Program provides opportunities for students to act as mentors for younger students. ➤ The Year Seven students are trained as peer mediators to support students in the playground context. ➤ Parents are encouraged to take an active role in Middle Schooling programs and activities. ➤ Professional learning communities established across local schools.
ADEQUATELY RESOURCED	School Strategic Renewal Plan outlines provision for resources. 4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ School budget allows for allocation for Middle School resources. ➤ Professional development opportunities are provided for teachers to continue to enhance their knowledge and skills in middle schooling practices. ➤ Extra staffing allocation to support effective teaching and learning in the middle years. ➤ Teachers continue to attend professional development in the use of information and communication technologies in student learning across the curriculum. 3

REFERENCES

1. *Pathways for Middle Schooling: Walking the Talk*. Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Brisbane, May 2004
2. *Neurological Considerations for Distinctive Middle Schooling* – Adapted from works by Blum, 1997; Giedd et.al., 1999; Gurian, 2001; Karges-Bone, 1999; Levitt, 2003; Moir & Jessel, 1989; Nadeau, 1996; Nagel, 2004,2005.
3. Adapted from *Pathways for Middle Schooling: Walking the Talk*. Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Brisbane, May 2004
4. From “How Teachers Perceive Multiaging in a Middle School” by K. Main & B. Fryer, 2005, *Journal of Multiage Education*, 1(2), p.16