

OANASCUS COLLEG

# Principal's Welcome

Good, Better, Best, Never let it rest, Until your good is better And your better best

This was the motto inscribed on an old Furphy water tank that stood within the yard of my childhood farm, it was a motto that resonated with me as a child about always striving to produce the best outcomes in any situation. Furphy water tanks have been relegated to history, but the motto that they worked towards, resonates very strongly with the Damascus College community.

Damascus College's strategic aspiration; Be. My. Best. is an integrated spiritual, educational, emotional and social world view that can be crafted to suit each individual. At its core lies the concept of self-determination: by being the best I can in every circumstance, I will flourish as a person, as a member of the community, and as a global citizen.

The 2021-2025 Strategic Plan is a product of extensive consultation and a reflective process undertaken by the College Board and Subcommittees, in collaboration with the leadership team, and is informed by community feedback collected throughout the school review process.

The plan focuses on who we are, what we believe and who we are becoming.

The plan is built around five pillars of school improvement – Faith & Catholic Identity, Learning & Leading, Wellbeing in Action, Community Connection and Future & Stewardship. Each pillar articulates a strategic aspiration to drive improvement, with three strategic priorities that enable each aspiration. Multiple focussed initiatives and success indicators have also been identified to direct improvement, until 2025. It is a plan that is both aspirational and achievable. A plan that will continue to grow Damascus College as a contemporary Christ-centered learning community.

With a rich tradition informed by the values, principles and practices of the Sisters of Mercy and the parishes of greater Ballarat, we are a community inspired by their example, and we remain committed to educational and social justice, to inclusive access, to student support and to diverse learning pathways.

My best, Your best and Our best, will be expressed in the self-growth, the wisdom, the endeavour and the compassion of all within the Damascus community. This aspiration builds on the foundation story in the life of the church, about God's loving conversion of St Paul on the road to Damascus, which is a story of hope and promise in a new future. It is this story about being our best, which inspires our plan and it is this same story of conversion for which our College is named.

It is our strategic aspiration that by 2025 - Be. My. Best.- Be. Your. Best. - Be Our Best – will be woven into the institutional fabric of Damascus College. It will enable every student, every staff member and every family member or community partner to become agents of their own futures. We will have opened pathways of self-determination relevant for today, tomorrow and forever.

Be. My. Best. will be evident in the capacities, the authenticity, the discernment, and humanity of those within the College who learn, teach, and enable. It will shine always in the lives that are illuminated By Living In The Light of Christ.

Be. My. Best. - our aspiration today. Our commitment through 2022-2024. Our inspiration by 2025.

I invite you to delve more deeply into our Strategic Plan.

#### Matthew Byrne

Principal, Damascus College

# **College Vision**

Damascus College is a dynamic Christ-centred learning community that values each member and is committed to inspiring and challenging students to reach their potential and contribute confidently to the global community.

# **College Motto**

To Live By The Light of Christ



### **BE-yond the Road to Damascus**

Be. My. Best. invites us to revisit the story for which our College is named as an inspiration for the best outcomes for each member of this school community, and their journey beyond their time at the College. The story of the conversion of Saul (St Paul) and his struggles and growth captures the essence of a dynamic contemporary Catholic education, in ensuring the best for the young people of this community.

Back in the year 33CE while on the road to Damascus, a man known as Saul of Tarsus had an experience that was to alter the course of his life. Saul had rejected that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified by Pontius Pilate, was alive and condemned those who believed. But Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and that experience turned his world upside down.

According to the story, Saul (Paul is his Roman name) is fanatical in his attempt to wipe out the new Christian Jewish movement that formed around Jesus of Nazareth. He supervises the stoning of one of the movement's key leaders. He terrorises the members. Many of the followers are arrested and imprisoned. Others leave Jerusalem in fear and scatter far and wide. Paul seeks authorisation from the Jerusalem High Priest to arrest the Christians in Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem. These people were known in the city as the followers of the Way. As Paul approaches Damascus, he has a blinding vision, a sudden realisation that he is perpetrating a terrible injustice. He comes to accept Jesus as the Messiah or Christ and becomes just as intent on promoting the movement as he had been on eradicating it.

Paul felt called, as the prophets of Israel had been called, to be "a light to the nations," and accepted baptism into the community of Christ's disciples at Damascus, and began his mission to spread the good news to the ends of the earth. From that time on, Paul Lives By The Light of Christ and brings others to do likewise.

Paul set about establishing basic faith communities that he identified as the churches of the body of Christ. They were to be communities without regard for race, gender or social standing. Paul set goals for journeys to bring the Good News to foreign places, and he demonstrated that he had the grit to be adaptable in trying circumstances which was central to the mission. At times Paul worked collaboratively, and at other times he moved forward alone. He settled for periods in a place then moved to new places to extend his work.

Paul's mission was criticised in Jerusalem and Antioch. He was ejected from Damascus. He was a failure in Athens, but Paul persevered. He supported the churches that he had succeeded in establishing by forwarding letters. Some letters we have records of in the Bible. Others are lost. He was arrested on several occasions, suffered illness, was shipwrecked and robbed, but nothing kept him from fighting the good fight and keeping the faith. He judged his life of struggle and suffering worthy, for he carried within him the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ. His strength came from the power and wisdom of God, whom he encountered on the road to Damascus, and he shared his story everywhere.

In his correspondence, Paul writes of his experience on the road to Damascus as a resurrection appearance, an experience that transformed his life in the same way as the resurrection transformed the lives of the first disciples. We remember Paul as a martyr and a saint. He had done his best.

As a College named for the mission and journey of St Paul, we are inspired to be our best. This is a foundation story in the life of the church about the power of God to turn around even the most fanatical of adversaries. It is a story of inclusion and forgiveness, a story of hope and promise in a new future. It is about being our best at school and beyond, and we are all responsible for creating a community and culture that is Christ-centred and nurtures optimal learning and holistic growth for each young person at Damascus College, with the support of committed and caring staff, families and community.

## **Holistic Framework**



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Gospel focus

Faith & Catholic Identin

Confidence

Critical thinking and broblem solving

Engaging Relationships

Social and emotional wellbeing

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Resilience

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Global cititation

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I'm supported I'm part of something greater It's what I have inside...and what's around me

Find my calling

I'm ready to take on anything

Perseverance

Community Connection

Cultural awareness

# **Our Strategic Aspiration**

Be. My. Best. requires an integrated spiritual, educational, emotional and social worldview that can be crafted to suit each individual. At its core lies the concept of self-determination: by being the best I can in every circumstance, I will flourish as a person, as a member of the community, and as a global citizen.

## **Aspiration Statement**

Be. My. Best. — our aspiration today. Our commitment through 2022-24. Our inspiration by 2025.

By 2025, Be. My. Best. will be woven into the institutional fabric of Damascus College. It will be recognised as a means of enabling every student, every staff member, and every family member or community partner to become agents of their own futures. It will have opened pathways of self-determination relevant for today, tomorrow, and forever.

Be. My. Best. will be expressed in the self-growth, wisdom, endeavour and compassion of all within the Damascus community. It will be evident in the capacities, authenticity, discernment and humanity of those within Damascus College who learn, teach and enable. It will shine always in lives that are illuminated By Living In The Light of Christ.

Be. My. Best. Be. Your. Best. Be. Our. Best.

# A Call to Action

Damascus College is called to be a Catholic, co-educational secondary school committed to spiritual values, dynamic learning, contemporary teaching, personal wellbeing, family engagement, and neighbourhood, regional and international outreach.

The College has a rich tradition as a Christ-centred community informed by the values, principles and practices of the Sisters of Mercy and the parishes and laypeople of central Victoria, who for more than 140 years have served the Ballarat community and surrounding districts. Inspired by their example, Damascus College is committed to educational and social justice, inclusive access, student support, and diverse learning pathways.

# **School Improvement Pillars**

- 1 Faith & Catholic Identity
- 2 Learning & Leading
- **3** Wellbeing in Action
- 4 Community Connection
- 5 Future & Stewardship

## **Aspiration Delivery Platforms**

Damascus College Strategic Plan: Aspiration 2025 Strategic Priorities (2022-24) Implementation/Focussed Initiatives (Stepped introduction 2022-24) Damascus College Annual Plans Progress/Accountability Reports (Annual Board Progress Report)

## Be. My. Best.

#### **Damascus College Attributes**

The Damascus College experience has a profound impact on all members of the community. These attributes describe the broader purpose of a Damascus College education. For students leaving the College the following are the lived expression of their education for life beyond Damascus College.

#### Attributes

#### Gospel focus in the Mercy tradition

Students have a developing sense of joy and wonder in their life and the world as a gift. They make informed choices showing commitment to human dignity, the common good, sustainability, justice and peace, creative and constructive acceptance of hardship in the spirit of Christian freedom and hope.

#### Self-awareness and emotional wellbeing

Students are self-aware, reflective and respectful of the uniqueness of each individual and of human diversity; they are flexible and resilient and have the capacity to accept and give constructive feedback; they act with integrity, foster inclusiveness, demonstrate empathy and take responsibility for their actions.

#### Critical thinking and problem solving

Students have the knowledge and skills to apply their learning reflectively, creatively, critically and practically in various contexts. Students are well prepared for ethical living, working autonomously and in collaborative teams responding to future challenges.

#### **Cultural awareness**

Students understand, respect and embrace the cultures and traditions of First Nations people and multicultural Australia.

#### **Global citizenship**

Students recognise their place and responsibility in the wider world and take an active role in their community, working with others to make our planet more peaceful, sustainable and just.

# Faith & Catholic Identity

#### **Our Aspiration**

Pillar

Be. My. Best. requires... an inclusive community of respectful dialogue that enriches faith and deepens the celebration of our Catholic tradition.

4. Extending a recontextualised and joyful exploration of the encounters that lead to, and express, faith

2. Developing a merciful embrace of our global responsibilities, including sustainability, First Nations people and multiculturalism

3. Building life-giving relationships of integrity, justice and peace

### **Our Focussed Initiatives**

Introducing Youth Ministry in Schools Reviewing Retreats and Reflection Days Developing Staff Faith Development opportunities – Teacher Accreditation Program Exploring parent, guardian faith opportunities Conducting a sustainability curriculum audit Exploring other immersion experiences Developing a Reconciliation Action Plan for First Nations in Victoria – indigenous opportunities Revisiting restorative justice – review, audit and professional learning Building SEL into assessment and reporting

Embed the principles of the Enhancing Catholic School's Identity Project into the planning and implementation of the Religious Education Curriculum.

# Pillar 2 Learning & Leading

### **Our Aspiration**

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Be. My. Best. requires... a culture of learning where the identity and purpose of the learner empowers them to thrive in and shape their current and future world.

1. Achieving agency for life at school and beyond, through the development of Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) capabilities and its contribution towards our learners' development of deeper learning competencies

**2.** Recognising that educators are co-agents in a mutually supportive relationship that helps all learners to progress towards their valued goals

**3.** A culture supported by educators committed to their professional growth in the best interests of the learner

### **Our Focussed Initiatives**

Building learner agency by explicitly and consistently introducing SEL as an essential part of assessment outcomes, reporting and it becomes part of the College vernacular by:

- Using what we already know about our learners to strengthen their learning
- Providing explicit criteria and feedback as to how our learners can achieve success through improvement

Assessing learning understanding and expanding opportunities to support growth through:

- Engaging all lessons with learning intentions and success criteria
- Enhancing feedback opportunities through Learning Areas by engaging students to reflect on their learning
- Introducing deep learning and SEL competencies as part of the Be. My. Best. Learning and Teaching Curriculum framework
- Introducing and building on deep learning opportunities through a multi-disciplinary approach such as:
  - Continuing to develop and refine ESTEEM in Year 8 STEM
  - Year 9 Social Dilemma
  - HOLP day program
  - CLIL

Using data to inform targeted support and enrichment for all learners by:

- Building on the tutor and re-engagement program
- Introducing Year 11 and 12 English Tutoring
- Targeting literacy and numeracy intervention in Year 7-10
- Enhancing reading by building on the Reading Renaissance and Reading Conferencing
- Introducing enhanced literacy strategies in the classroom ie. writing revolution
- Targeting approaches to inform-subject introduction and learner access into pathways (VCE & VCAL)

Educators to engage in professional learning and practice through:

- Supporting educators to have regular, collaborative and focussed opportunities to work together to shape effective contemporary learning and teaching (collaborative cultures)
- Consolidation of collaborative frameworks using Professional Learning Communities
- Driving consistent instructional practice to accommodate the needs of all learners
- Implementation of High Impact Teaching strategies
- Engaging in evidence-based decision making



# **Wellbeing in Action**

#### **Our Aspiration**

Be. My. Best. requires... an environment where students flourish and can manage their wellbeing effectively, enriched by a holistic learning and teaching program and the development of Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) skills.

**1.** Promoting a community where SEL can help students learn the competencies and skills they need to give them agency over their lives

**2.** Ensuring that everyone has access to a meaningful and purposeful curriculum that allows them to positively engage in their learning pathway

**3.** Nurturing an environment where active care and compassion to others is embedded into school culture and traditions

### **Our Focussed Initiatives**

Introducing SEL success criteria on student reports

Recognising SEL skills in assessment task criteria and learning outcomes

Conducting a curriculum audit addressing the integration of SEL skills into learning programs

Developing alternative modes of delivery to meet each student at their point of need and for students struggling with engagement with their learning environment

Developing tutor/re-engagement program to support school refusers

Conducting yearly ACER wellbeing survey

Developing a trauma informed teaching model introduced to all teaching staff

Developing parent, staff, career workshops to support students in curriculum pathways, including identifying and building awareness of other options

Growing individual career conversations



# **Community Connection**

#### **Our Aspiration**

Pillar

Be. My. Best. requires... a proud school community of members that is confident, connected and values its links with the local and global community.

**1.** Fostering confident and diverse means of communication that builds pride, creates dialogue, celebrates our points of difference, and enhances our position as a College of first choice

2. Developing strong, intergenerational connections that build parent and alumni collaboration

**3.** Building quality links to the local, national, and global community with partnerships that strengthen capacity, student pathways and student experience

### **Our Focussed Initiatives**

Developing the Damascus brand to be consistent, confident and easily recognisable to raise the profile of the College including a new Be. My. Best. campaign in line with current messaging

Actively seeking new ways to create dialogue with students, giving them a voice to drive student improvement

Be known for teaching excellence and innovation, and an employer of choice

Using video to engage community online

Working with community to identify ways to build student pride and their experience at Damascus Developing innovative ways to promote unique points of difference to raise the profile of the College

Alumni engagement initiatives:

- Developing an intergenerational marketing campaign
- Developing an alumni mentor system for students
- Enhancing the celebration of alumni on website and other platforms
- Growing alumni engagement opportunities to enhance alumni pride
- Developing and grow fundraising opportunities for alumni giving

Parent engagement initiatives:

- Identifying ways to increase parent engagement with PAM
- Promoting the TA system and its benefits as a point of difference
- Introducing new ways to enhance parent connection and engagement

Community engagement initiatives:

- Developing a Services Directory to connect businesses and services within the community
- Creating and building links and partnerships with local, national and global organisations to build capacity and offer engaging student opportunities
- Growing engagement with Catholic Education Office, Primary Schools and Parishes to raise profile and increase Catholic enrolments
- Developing relationships with not for profits in line with College mission
- Developing sponsorship opportunities that assist student programs to thrive
- Developing Damascus Events Centre usage guidelines and processes

# Pillar 5 Future & Stewardship

#### **Our Aspiration**

Be. My. Best. requires... attention to the changing educational environment of our community and acting as responsible stewards.



1. Providing the facilities and infrastructure to support continued growth and development

**2.** Ensuring financial policies, systems and practices enable short term financial viability, are sustainable over the long term, and flexible to respond to opportunities

**3.** Providing policies, systems and practices that continually identify, assess, and treat business and operational risks while ensuring ongoing regulatory and system compliance

#### **Our Focussed Initiatives**

Envisioning and positioning Damascus for the future through the Damascus 2030 plan

Evolving a new Facilities Masterplan to identify, prioritise and develop the needs of our community

Developing a new campus Maintenance Plan to continue to renew and refresh Damascus facilities and ensure a safe space for everyone

Enabling an ICT Strategic Plan to position the school to be a leader in the delivery of education, school operations and engagement with our community

Monitoring and reviewing the Damascus tuition fee structure to provide families the opportunity for affordable Catholic education.

Reviewing fee collection processes and ensuring families understand the importance of their contributions for the continued successful outcomes at Damascus

Enhancing the College reporting capabilities and interrogating data for deeper insights into current and emerging trends

Increasing capabilities and enhancing systems to improve processes, user experiences and support accountabilities

Using networks to effectively gauge best practices and continue to share the Damascus values among the broader Catholic community

Transitioning the College to a new advisory structure and under the governance of DOBCEL

Implementing and adapting the DOBCEL suite of policies and procedures for Damascus to thrive as a leader within the Ballarat Diocesan group of schools



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