Dear Parents and Caregivers

My husband tells me that I was ‘born 80’, that I was never young and silly, ‘like normal people.’ Not for a minute is this meant to be, nor is it taken to be, a compliment!

It’s true to a large extent that reflection has always been an important part of my life. From a young age, I’ve watched others and watched myself and thought and prayed about the fundamentals of life and considered the big questions. Not in any intellectual sense but rather as an ordinary person trying to figure out how to lead a life that, at the end of the day, will have made a difference to someone. I think that comes with having seen a lot of waste of life from a young age. Perhaps we all, when placed in such circumstances, either repeat the mistakes of the past or try to make amends in our own way. Sometimes we do both – all in one lifetime.

So where am I going with this? Over the holidays, one of our parents sent me the link to a radio program in which Phillip Adams and Hugh McKay talk about the ideas contained in Hugh’s book, ‘The Good Life’. Thank you Lisa!

‘The good life’ – now that’s worth consideration and reflection, don’t you think? It’s important to think about this so we don’t spend all our precious time chasing after the things that can only promise an ‘illusion of happiness’. We all know what those things are. We also know that these things bring no more than fleeting happiness at best and yet we still pursue them relentlessly while ignoring what is right before our eyes. To cut to the chase, Hugh McKay concludes that ‘the good life’ can only be attained in relationship and connectedness to others - in turning the focus from ‘me’ to ‘us’- in placing importance on community and service.

Now this is not new thinking and in our heart of hearts we know it to be true. It is in relationship, community and service that we find fundamental meaning in life. Facing the answer to, ‘Am I to be, a compliment!’

Hugh McKay also talked about ‘a new neurosis’ he calls ‘the utopia complex’ which basically sees us believing that happiness is our birth-right and perfection is desirable and should be pursued. Children grow up believing in their un-critiqued specialness and their unquestioned right to have whatever they want. Parents often try to create the ‘perfect’ conditions for children and see it as their role to provide everything for them. Rather than raising well-adjusted, capable, responsible adults, the opposite becomes the case with young people unprepared for the realities of life with all its ups and downs. Indeed we cannot be happy all the time, we cannot have everything we might want, things happen that cause great sadness, people can be unkind, sometimes we have to do without etc and we had better learn how to deal these realities—when we are young.

Combine this with growing up in a digital universe (Twitter, Facebook, Google, YouTube, texting…) that thrives on self-revelation and instant gratification – often beyond all sense of reasonableness, good taste or moral value – and we have the ingredients for concern. McKay says that these feed the underlying belief ‘I am the centre of the universe’ and ‘I am interesting to everyone.’ There is so much to think about in this new world of ours. The problem is, we find ourselves in the midst of it all before having the chance to consider safeguards and ramifications of participation.

These things, and so much more, make ‘the good life’ a very interesting proposition to consider. I’ve noticed over more recent years that even the word ‘good’ carries a negative connotation. Young people seem to see goodness as ‘uncool’. They see it as the antithesis of being cutting edge, exciting and worthy of attention. It isn’t as attractive as the brash, bragging, attention-seeking activities that draw hundreds of thousands to certain YouTube videos for instance.

Isn’t it time to reclaim the worthiness of basic human goodness? It’s time to stand unashamedly in a quest for simple human kindness that grows from a loving heart put to the building of respectful relationships, healthy, caring community and commitment to the common good. This is the opposite of a selfish, self-absorbed life. Have a great week everyone. Let’s make it a (truly) good one and teach our kids to do the same.

Glenda
At St John's College we provide quality education in an environment that nurtures children in their Catholic faith.
QUOTE OF THE WEEK
“Music in the soul can be heard by the universe.”
~ Lao Tzu ~

TIP OF THE WEEK - Sit with your child while they play at home. Maybe they could show you how to play a few notes.

WELCOME BACK - Welcome back to Term 3! We are so excited to be back after spending five fabulous days in Maryborough with 800 fellow music teachers for the most incredible Music professional development. From Thursday 4 July to Monday 8 July we have been immersed in a variety of learning – from iPads in Music to on the spot theatrical improvisation to the essentials of music in all of our lives and so much more.

The highlights of the conference, however, had to be the experience of meeting and speaking with four outstanding musicians James Morrison, John Foreman, David Jones, Julian Bliss, and Darren Percival. It was the experience of these men, speaking openly to us about their musical story, their down to earth persona, and the opportunity to create music with them that will stay with us for a very long time.

CONGRATULATIONS - Congratulations to the students who will be receiving a Principal’s Award this week for their success in Music during Term 2.

DATE CLAIMERS
Grandparents’ Day - Thursday 25 July
Stella Fair - Sunday 4 August
Piccolo Choir and Strings on Assembly - Thursday 8 August
Queensland Catholic Schools Music Festival - Friday 16 August
Stella Spotlight - Wednesday 16 October
All Choral and Instrumental Ensembles

WORLD’S BIGGEST ORCHESTRA – Do you want to make musical history? Do you want to witness musical history being made? Here’s your chance! Queensland Music Festival (QMF) kicks off with a bang; two official GUINNESS WORLD RECORDSTM challenges in one day on Saturday 13 July - the World’s Biggest Orchestra and the Largest Trumpet Ensemble - and you’re invited. Whatever your orchestral instrument of choice; whether you’re part of a school or community orchestra, string ensemble, concert or brass band, a professional musician or play just for fun - you could be playing alongside QMF Artistic Director and internationally renowned musician, James Morrison, and up to 10,000 other musicians at Suncorp Stadium. A chance like this may only come once in a lifetime, so register now and be able to say that you were part of it! Register at www.worldsbiggestorchestra.com

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC NEWS - Instrumental, Singing and Speech tuition timetables have been emailed to all enrolled families. If you did not receive yours, it means we do not have your correct email address! Please email to StellaMarisMusic@bne.catholic.edu.au and a copy will be sent to you. Timetables are also shown on the notice board outside the music room.

Remember, if you need to contact your child’s tutor, details are shown on the top left corner of the lesson timetable. If you have queries regarding anything musical – please feel free to catch up with us before or after school, by contacting us in writing or via email.

Musically Yours,
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NSW University Computer Competition
Twenty-six Stella Maris students participated in the NSW University Computer Competition in May. The following children received a Credit for their Computer skills:


Congratulations to all students who sat this competition. Certificates will be given out on Assembly this week.
What’s the matter with ‘average’? Part 2.

A second major consideration is the frequent misuse and misinterpretation of assessment data. This also certainly contributes to our concern for anyone not achieving high marks.

NAPLAN is a great example of an assessment process raising such concerns. As an ideal, NAPLAN has the potential to provide valuable data about both individuals and groups of students. It provides a measure of achievement in terms of a child’s ability to pass the NAPLAN assessments - and this provides information about a child’s literacy and numeracy skills at a fixed point in time. It also provides information about the overall ability of classes of children, entire schools and also entire geographic regions. As such, when used wisely NAPLAN data can be used as a basis to strengthen teaching that is working well and to address areas of weakness.

The problems of NAPLAN become evident in consideration of unrealistic or inappropriate interpretations of the data. This in turn can lead to inaccurate or misplaced judgments being made about both individual and group abilities.

A school that boasts a high overall NAPLAN score is not necessarily performing better than a school with a low overall NAPLAN score. For example, a school working with a children of a wide range of abilities cannot effectively be compared to a school that focuses on teaching the children of highly educated parents. Schools need to be compared to other schools of similar demographics. In my experience some of the best teaching occurs in the most disadvantaged classrooms.

It is also important that we realize that it is not possible to look at the progress a school is making in terms of year to year changes in results. As Professor Helen Wildy (Dean of Education at UWA) recently said, progress can only be realistically assessed across ten years of assessment. It is meaningless to look at changes from year to year. Moreover, we can only realistically interpret changing scores when all other variables are considered.

In terms of individual performance, it is important to acknowledge that a student’s progress needs to be assessed with a mix of formal assessments and in class observations. Formal assessments such as NAPLAN provide valuable data but, only as part of the bigger picture. Teachers and parents need to be mindful of using assessment data to guide them to help students to progress at school, not as an absolute measure of ability.

Even more pressing is the need to guide parents’ interpretations of assessment data in relation to their desire to have high performing children. It is not possible for every child to achieve exceptional academic outcomes. However, it is theoretically possible for every child to progress to outcomes that reflect the best of their abilities.

Ultimately it is perhaps best to consider that while nationwide assessments have the potential to offer valuable information; this information is only useful if interpreted in a meaningful and accurate way.

It is also vital to disseminate information gathered with both the use of appropriate language and an understanding that being ‘normal’ really can be a good way to be.

Dr Helen Street is an applied social psychologist with a passion for education. She presents her work in books, articles and in seminars and workshops for schools.

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