BCE media release

Care, compassion and teamwork at the heart of St Mary's College pastoral approach

At St Mary's College, Ipswich, family engagement is not an add-on, but a fundamental part of student wellbeing, learning and success.

That commitment was recognised at Brisbane Catholic Education's (BCE) Excellence Awards in August, with the pastoral team receiving the Excellence Award for Family Engagement.

Led by Assistant Principal Student Wellbeing Danielle Jorgensen, the team brings together pastoral leaders, Guidance Counsellors, Support Teachers Inclusive Education (ST-IEs) and support staff to ensure families are active partners in their daughter's education.

Danielle said that "listening is always our starting point".

"We strive to lead with compassion, empathy and a genuine desire to understand each person's story.

"We make a conscious effort to build relationships with families before challenges arise, so that when support is needed, there is already a foundation of trust."

Guidance Counsellor Rebecca Padgett said those relationships were one of the strongest protective factors for student wellbeing.

"When families and the school share information and work together, students feel more secure, connected and supported.

"It also means we can notice concerns early and put the right supports in place sooner."
A key strength of the St Mary's model is the close collaboration of the team.

Through regular wrap-around meetings and coordinated case discussions, the team shares insights, aligns support strategies and ensures students and families experience a consistent approach.

"The team bring different expertise, but we share the same focus: supporting students and families, usually at the hardest, most challenging times," Danielle said.

"By collaborating closely, we can share relevant information and develop holistic support plans that address both wellbeing and learning needs."

For families, that means greater clarity and continuity of care.

"They don't have to navigate support on their own or repeat their story to different people," Rebecca said.

Whether discussing classroom adjustments, support plans or wellbeing goals, families are involved in decision-making and supported to understand how strategies can be reinforced at home.

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“We want families to feel that their voice matters and that they are genuinely part of the decisions about their daughter's wellbeing,” Rebecca said.

The team's work is supported through parent education opportunities, wellbeing-focused communications, regular updates in the Principal's newsletter and professional development.

For Rebecca, one of the most rewarding aspects of the team's work is seeing relationships strengthen over time.

"I'm most proud of the trust and sense of partnership our team has built with families.

“As that partnership grows, conversations become more open and students see the important adults in their lives working together for them."

Principal Alison Gilbert said the award reflects the dedication of a team committed to ensuring every student is surrounded by a strong network of care.

“This team has created a culture of trust, compassion and collaboration, where families feel genuinely respected and included as partners in their daughter’s journey.

“This recognition affirms our commitment to ensuring every student is supported through that wrap-around approach that connects wellbeing, learning and belonging.

“Seeing families move from feeling frustrated or disconnected to feeling heard, valued and supported is incredibly powerful and it speaks to the dedication and professionalism of this remarkable team.”

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