

The John Berne School

1 Thomas Street Lewisham NSW 2049

Established in 1998, The John Berne School (TJBS) is an independent Catholic school operated by the Marist Brothers. TJBS is part of the Association of Catholic Special School Services (Sydney) and the national Marist Schools Australia network. It provides a positive alternative for Year 7-10 students whose education is *at risk*. Students who enrol have a diagnosed disability such as a behavioural or emotional disorder and/or have been unable to cope in mainstream schools. Many students have significant difficulties with literacy and numeracy and past experience of school exclusion. TJBS employs 26 staff including a counselling team and works with around 50 students. This level of staffing allows the school to provide a broad range of programs for students and their families and some services to other schools. Students with a language background other than English comprise 31% and 9% identify as Indigenous (2012). In 2012 43 students were males and 10 female.

How this program works

With a strong emphasis on *pastoral care*, TJBS aims to enable students to *see beyond their troubles*, to *dare to dream* and in the words of the school motto, to *“Hope Always”*. The school operates with a *family spirit*, building positive relationships in a *flexible learning environment* where students call teachers by their first name and have no set uniform or homework. Each student receives a level of individual attention unavailable in mainstream schools including fortnightly meetings with a counsellor who assists them with behavioural needs. The school encourages students’ self-discipline by combining this support with clear expectations, rules that promote acceptance of rights and responsibilities and individual behaviour plans. Students are in these ways challenged to *move beyond what holds them back*.

From Monday to Thursday there is a 7-period timetable from 8.30am-2.10pm. Most classes have no more than five students. On Fridays, students are involved in personal and social development which may include excursions, leisure activities, guest speakers or celebrating religious days.

Students have literacy instruction four times per week for forty minutes to strengthen their learning in the mandatory Board of Studies subjects. Further one-to-one literacy and learning support is provided as needed in the school’s Learning Advancement Centre. In 2011, a new subject was introduced for Years 9 and 10, Work Education. This is part of the job ready! program that also includes work experience each term, job application and interview techniques and workplace communication skills. A breakfast program, outdoor activities and camps and Skills for Living, such as healthy cooking, budgeting and communication, further support students’ learning and personal development.

Outcomes

Positive outcomes, indicating the success of this program, include: young people re-engaging in education, experiencing positive relationships with teachers, counsellors and the broader school community, building *foundations for the future* through significant personal and academic achievement:

Credentialed attainment: 14 students attained the Year 10 School Certificate in 2011. The School Certificate was replaced with the Year 10 ROSA (Record of School Achievement) across New South Wales in 2012.

Program wide achievements: NAPLAN results show steady improvements in spelling and reading (2008-11). 18% of Year 9 achieved reading results in the top two bands (2011) (for All Schools this was 20%). 13% of Year 10's achieved School Certificate English Literacy results in the top two bands (2011). All of the graduating Year 10's interviewed for an evaluation of the school in 2009 had a positive view of their future.

Destinations and pathways: Six months after graduation, 100% of Year 10 graduates (2011) were engaged in full time study or employment. 83% went on to Year 11 at other schools; 17% took up apprenticeships or other jobs.

Engagement and participation in learning: The average student attendance rate in 2011 was 79%. Students consistently report that they like attending TJBS.

Productive partnerships: More than 100 businesses supported the job ready! program (2011).

Wider influence: TJBS's Student Withdrawal Assistance Program (SWAP) is accessed by mainstream schools. It provides assessment of students' learning and behavioural strengths and weaknesses and short-term placements for assistance with special needs.

Why this program is successful

An evaluation of the school identified the commitment of staff, careful design and monitoring of programs, graduated skills development and the rebuilding of students' self-worth as key success factors. The Year 10 students interviewed identified positive relationships with staff, the *diversified* curriculum and 1:1 assistance as helping them achieve personally and academically. One parent commented, *With its unique teaching style and approach to our children, it certainly keeps them engaged in their education and restores their self esteem.*

Want to know more?

<http://www.learningchoices.org.au/programs/747/The-John-Berne-School.php>

<http://www.johnberneschool.org/>

Sources of information

ACARA My School (2012) website (accessed 8/5/13)

The John Berne School & Pete's Place School (2012) Annual School Report to the Community 2011

The John Berne School (2013) website (accessed 6/5/13).

Vallance, R. (2010). When a school offers hope: An initial report of research in a special school for behaviour disordered students. In S. Howard & K. Drysdale (Eds.), Australian Association for Research in Education Conference Proceedings, Annual Conference, 28 November-2 December, 2010, Melbourne.

Please note, where possible and appropriate, we have adopted the language and terminology used by the program sources (*italic fonts*) and referred to the most recent publically available information.

This vignette was developed in 2013 by **The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning** (part of the Australian Government's Collaborative Research Network) for the project *Putting the jigsaw together: innovative learning engagement programs in Australia* and supported by the **Ian Potter Foundation**.

