

## Case study

### Chevalier College

**Chevalier College is a 66-year-old congregational Catholic co-educational high school with approximately 1150 students. It is owned by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSH) and operates within their Charism. Chevalier has 100 acres of well-maintained grounds in the NSW Southern Highlands.**

#### The school ethos

The school motto is 'Fortes in Fide' (Strong in Faith). Within the MSH Charism, students are encouraged and supported to be the best people they can be and to be the best carers of others they can be.

In reflecting on what began the school's environmental actions, the Principal related how a number of years ago students who had been part of the school's Immersion Program in the Republic of Kiribati described how 'we are abusing our school' through the amount of plastics, electricity and non-renewable resources being used. The school listened and began to change practices.

Now as a part of the school sustainability ethos, students and staff are asked to:

- be mindful of their use of all resources, such as utilities, products and the natural environment
- consider the impact their use of a resource will have on the local and wider community.

This is an example of the school's focus on student citizenship and recognition that students appreciate the opportunity to be change agents and that environmental education programs, in particular, are more effective when they are student centred and based on personal experience.

#### Getting started and governance

In 2010 over 100 students were given the opportunity of taking executive positions in student-led committees in the College, one of which was the Environment Group. This gave student leaders the opportunity to initiate sustainable activities such as solar panelling. In 2011 the school maintained 100 students in leadership programs, however students are now aligned to the House system where they identify and implement projects across a range of issues including sustainability. This may include implementing recycling programs as well as many other initiatives important to the students.

#### Teaching, learning and curriculum

The College began as a boarding school with a farm that produced a variety of foods for boarders and staff to eat. Year 7 students now maintain a permaculture garden and agricultural students run show cattle teams and grow organic vegetables. Sustainability is taught as part of the geography and science courses. As the whole school community continues to define the need for learning for sustainability and resource management, the Principal intends to develop sustainable activities across the whole curriculum.

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#### Strengths

- school ethos, governance and leadership
- building sustainability into the curriculum
- students leading change through an Immersion Program and student leadership structures
- networks and partnerships.

[www.chevalier.nsw.edu.au](http://www.chevalier.nsw.edu.au)  
[office@chevalier.nsw.edu.au](mailto:office@chevalier.nsw.edu.au)

The school's Wilderness elective for Years 8-12 has been running for many years and enables students to learn about caring for the environment through engaging with it. It focuses on the development of understanding about the environment and using it cleverly. The ultimate aim of the elective is that in Year 12 students are able to plan and develop a five-day immersion into the wilderness where they look after themselves while they walk from Bowral in the Southern Highlands to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains. They cannot leave any trace of their journey and over the five days spend a lot of time engaging with nature.

Also, in 2009 students from the Year 9 Wilderness class took a 10-week environmental education research program developed by a doctoral student from the University of Wollongong. Six students and their families volunteered to take part in a research project to assess their ecological footprint and then sign up to actions to improve or support their environmental practices over three months. The research aimed to identify how students influence actions and behaviours at home.

The Sustainable Schools NSW (SSNSW) website has been used for the development of both student activities and teaching, providing many useful activities and tools.

### **Resource management**

Students initiated the installation of solar panels, arguing that producing solar electricity would reduce the school's carbon footprint and that the panels would be an educational tool to develop students' understanding of sustainability. The 2009 Environment Group also encouraged fellow students to turn off lights and electrical equipment when not being used.

In planning new buildings or refurbishing existing ones, the architect is required to develop a design with a strong commitment to sustainability. New buildings incorporate water tanks and eco-design, which maximises natural ventilation and lighting, and they are built with sustainable products.

The school's priority is to maximise the use of resources and reduce the waste. The College has an effective green waste recycling program where organic waste is composted and placed on the school gardens. In the agricultural plot, nothing goes to waste or leaves the site.

**'Be the best person you can be  
by caring for other people, the  
community and the environment.'**

**A student, after returning from Kiribati**

### **Networks and partnerships**

The school's networks extend internationally to the Republic of Kiribati where the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart have a Chevalier College. An island nation located in the Pacific Ocean, Kiribati is composed of 32 atolls and one raised coral island, dispersed over 3.5 million square kilometres. It is at great risk with rising sea levels. Once a year students from Year 11 volunteer to teach English and other activities in Kiribati. The students find that they meet people who have less than themselves and are happy. The program has established a strong belief among the students of needing to go out and help others.

### **Learning outcomes**

Students who have spent time in Kiribati come back and are ready to change the world. They talk about needing a deep understanding of 'being community'. They connect the consequences of 'our environmental abuse' with the impact on the people of the atoll who have much less. As the Principal says, 'They go away kids and they come back adults.'

These students have an impact on the rest of the school community, sharing their experiences, stories, photos and learning through assemblies and in classrooms.

The student's experiences also become the drivers for the school's funding and work with Kiribati the following year through the College's Mission Fund. Some students choose to return to Kiribati as a gap year activity when they leave the school.