

# **Developing Pastoral Care Structures and Staff Support in New Schools**

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## Developing Pastoral Care Structures and Staff Support in New Schools

### *Introductory remarks:*

Independent schools – and, if you will permit me, Anglican independent schools in particular – pride themselves in their provision of pastoral care. A quick search of independent school websites reveals pastoral care as a common theme running from site to site, perhaps even more pervasive than academics or even sport. Websites, of course, are the new billboards and advertising detritus of the computing age but the simple fact that pastoral care is a theme common to almost all school advertising must indicate that in the very least the website compilers and designers consider it to be an important issue which attracts the attention of prospective parents.

Defining pastoral care can be challenging. The Uniting Church in Australia defines pastoral care as being:

*“the provision made for the physical and emotional, moral, academic and spiritual well being of the student, the welfare of staff and pastoral support for the family. In its broadest sense, pastoral care encompasses every member of a school community.”*

In another sense, pastoral care can be seen as encompassing everything a school does, at the individual, group, family and community levels. If one reflects on the relational hotbed that is schooling there is little that a school does that is not value-laden and pastorally-based. Even when teaching the quadratic formula or the history of the Han dynasty teachers model ways of thinking, modes of perception and methods of interacting. Thus, if we agree with our racial nomenclature – *homo sapiens* being thinking or “wise” man according to the Oxford English Dictionary – we are led to conclude that even the most arid classroom can serve a pastoral, as well as an academic, purpose.

But how do our students and parents (increasingly depersonalised to the level of *clients* as business parlance increasingly suffuses our schools) view pastoral care? New schools are very much affected by parental perceptions. It is vital that we are perceived to be a viable alternative to neighbouring schools, despite our limited resources, our building noise and dust and our “do it once and it’s innovative, do it twice and it must be a tradition” operation.

As a teacher of Middle School history I frequently turn to the “W” questions to try to catch the essence of an issue:

### ***What is pastoral care?***

Students might say it is what we do pastoral care periods: Check diaries, discuss programmes and learn skills such as peer mediation, occasionally delve into the “touchy feely” stuff. Pastoral Care is something that is *done to* students, a notion that some staff possibly might share as well.

Parents, on the other hand, most probably look for pastoral care in our teaching, in our instructing of sport and other activities, in the way we provide counselling for our students and in the way we correct inappropriate behaviour. Parents perceive pastoral care in the way we provide effective follow up to a range of issues from health concerns to family difficulties to playground disputes.

A Deputy Principal looks for structure and might sense pastoral care in the way that staff report and react to concerns affecting school climate in general and the smooth operation of the classroom in particular. According to this view a good pastoral care programme has identifiable outcomes and content delivered in a predictable, structured programme.

As a (new) Principal I perceive pastoral care as belonging in the realm of expectations and behaviours which develop engagement in students. In this sense pastoral care includes all the behaviours and expectations that support the development of the student within the sphere of influence of the school. Effective pastoral care results in student engagement: Engagement with learning (in all areas of endeavour); engagement with others (including positive interaction with peers, parents and other adults); and; most importantly and perhaps most challengingly, engagement with one's spirituality.

### **Why?**

Corporate-style analysis might perceive pastoral care as being the critical *point of difference* which distinguishes us from other schools but I personally hope there are more substantive reasons why we commit so much of our time to pastoral care.

I suggest that many of our parents see pastoral care as stemming from the values base of the school. Even though many of our parents might deny the immediate personal relevance of the Christian faith they seem increasingly willing to place their children in the care of schools which clearly articulate a Christian world view. It could be that parents give their children into our trust because they perceive the alternatives to fall short of their expectations. On the other hand, parents may simply want to have their children in an environment characterised by a conviction of value of the individual and the recognition of consequences for one's actions.

Where parents elect for their children to attend an independent school the pastoral care programme can complement the family's values even when the values of the home can be substantially different to the school's core values. In some cases the school provides a level of care which some families find difficulty in giving.

From the educational perspective pastoral care might be viewed as a way of modelling behaviour and providing valuable life skills: weary teachers are motivated by the (sometimes forlorn?) hope that something of what the school exhibits will rub off, sink in or possibly, just possibly, be reciprocated.

As a Principal I see the development of effective pastoral care as a critical developmental goal in the growing school culture. Pastoral care structures need to be annually evaluated, revised and refined as the school grows from year to year.

The development of a culture of high expectations can include an element of risk. Setting a high level of expectation on everything from uniform standards to the schools "code of conduct" engenders an element of risk, as many of our parents have little experience with independent education. Most parents are very pleased with the notion of high expectations – until their own children need to be reminded of those expectations.

A little too frequently I have spent time with parents who believe the School's expectations are in place for the protection of their children, without always realising that the same expectations are for the benefit of other parents' children as well. Some parents will perceive our standards as being "too caring" or not allowing for individual differences, whilst some students will make it very clear that they prefer a more *laissez faire* approach. (On the other hand there will be the

occasional parent who feels that the school is not firm enough, often harking back to a nostalgia-infused “golden age” when students respected teachers and always made appropriately mature decisions.)

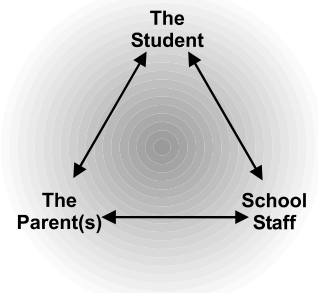
This can be challenging for enrolments as children appear to exercise more and more influence on decisions regarding which school they wish to attend. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the selection of a suitable uniform. Ultimately new schools take something of a calculated risk about the standards they decide to adopt – and enforce. It is therefore important that schools observe principles of procedural fairness in the implementation of the disciplinary aspects of their pastoral care policies.

### ***Where (and when)?***

No part or activity of a school is beyond the reach of pastoral care, not even a boys' locker room or – dare I say it – a Mathematics Staffroom. Pastoral care is practised in the classroom, in the playground, on the playing field, in the boarding house, in outdoor education and in co-curricular activities including excursions, outdoor education camps, clubs, societies, theatrical groups and musical ensembles. Ideally it is also practised in staff meetings, the staffroom, the Principal's Office, at each other's homes and down at the favourite watering hole (the latter cases referring to pastoral care of staff). Pastoral Care practises might even be found in the school Boardroom.

### ***Who?***

All school staff, from the newest office staff member to the longest serving principal, are involved in pastoral care inasmuch as their interactions must be grounded in a suitable standard of care. Pastoral care is not the preserve of academic staff, although members of the teaching staff are generally in a better position to develop more rounded relationships with students.



Effective and timely communication with parents is vital for effective pastoral care. Communication develops support for, and commitment to, the partnership that needs to be developed as soon as possible between the school and the home.

Diaries are a good start, whilst email is possibly a good antidote, to effective communication. Effective use and regular checking of diaries is essential to ensure vital messages are passed from home to school and back again. St Columba Anglican School is developing a protocol for the use of email, as students and parents and even staff can sometimes fall into the trap of “burning” the recipient. Schools need to articulate their standards through the development and communication of clear policies and procedures in all arenas.

Another valuable communication tool which can be compiled from discussions at staff or pastoral care committee meetings is the Pastoral Care Bulletin. It is important that confidentiality is observed at all times to ensure that this sensitive information is kept within the school. Care needs to be exercised with these documents. They must not be left lying around the staffroom or on teachers' desks. Email is one method that can be a little more secure than photocopied pages.

The people at the other end of the diary frequently need support. Some schools implicitly offer pastoral care and support to their families through sensitive management of fee-related issues, access to educational support and the development of links with local parishes. Others schools provide more explicit pastoral care by offering programmes including support for the parenting role and even marriage guidance counselling.

Finally, the pastoral care of staff is a vital issue. The challenges of developing a new school make significant demands on staff. Resources are few (especially at the very beginning) and time is limited, while needs and priorities seem to know few bounds. Everyone and everything is new and there frequently seems to be a flood of decisions that needs to be stemmed and communicated to various recipients.

In the early years of the secondary school each KLA may be represented by a single teacher who lacks the support of a faculty to help discuss and crystallise teaching methods, resources and related processes such as assessment and programme evaluation. It is vital that Principals encourage their staff to develop networks with teachers from other schools and attend meetings of professional groups.

Away from the school many new staff have little backup from their extended families as they may have relocated from interstate or other distant centres to take their positions. The spiritual needs of these families are significant as they search for a new church home and develop new friendships.

As the school grows its character will inevitably change. As new students and new staff swell the ranks the school will appear to be a new institution each year. It is likely that established staff and foundation parents will feel a sense loss and mourn the little school which started so warmly, where all staff and parents knew each other by their first names and the energy and enthusiasm for pioneering a new school filled the classrooms with expectancy.

The Principal will need to navigate this potential shoal water with skill, foresight, compassion, diplomacy and clear communication, all the while gently reminding staff and parents alike that for the school to thrive it must grow. The Principal will also need to enlist the help of established staff to ensure that the school's ethos and expectations remain intact.

### ***What are the limits?***

When does the pastoral care school day begin and finish? What are limits of pastoral care? Some see the effective hours for pastoral care to be restricted to 35/5 – the 35 hours the students are within the school for five days each week. Saturday sport or other activities might extend this envelope to 36/6. Outdoor education camps can see the Pastoral Care timeframe extend to the increasingly popular 24/7, but anyone who has been on a substantial camp knows how draining this commitment can be.

Nevertheless, due to the need for philosophical consistency and child protection often the school's influence and pastoral concern transcends normal school hours. New parents are often not averse to ringing staff at home to discuss uniform requirements and other minutia. This is not always welcome. On the other hand I believe it is appropriate to encourage staff to be alert to student behaviours out of class hours and discuss them where necessary in the pastoral care processes of the school.

Time is a very rare commodity during the precious 6½ or 7 hours of any school day. New schools in particular are susceptible to excessive time demands as small staff numbers and the need to develop new policies, ensure compliance, develop resources and conduct professional development all clamour for their fair share of time. The pastoral care of students and especially the pastoral care of staff can easily be overlooked in such a busy environment.

### ***What is the reality of new schools?***

St Columba has pursued the establishment of a House-based pastoral care system that is intended to assist students as they make the transition from Junior School (class teacher provided pastoral care) to Middle School (team based pastoral care) and on to Senior School (House based pastoral care). I am, therefore, very interested to find out what strategies other new schools have been using

All 21 new<sup>1</sup> Anglican schools in NSW were polled by an email in which I requested responses to eleven questions relating to pastoral care and pastoral care structures. It is a reflection on the "busy-ness" of these new schools that less than 24% responded. I am grateful all the more to those principals who spared the time to respond.

### ***Results:***

This background paper does not attempt to be a learned investigation or provide multivariate analysis of a range of data. Each question of the email poll is simply listed with the responses as received compiled below it:

## **1. Are Houses a valid avenue for developing connectedness and resilience between/in students?**

- a) *Yes. With all the different events that occur within the College's calendar incorporating the House system provides the opportunity for the children to identify with the school in something other than the classroom, to participate in something with students from other years, develop a sense of belonging and ownership of a House, and associate with teachers in a different environment. House Captains play an important leadership role in the connectedness and resilience issue.*
- b) *Useful in creating a bond between students. Provides a "connectedness" re school and specific activities at School. At a welfare inservice on Monday re "Mindmatters" - the importance of "connectedness" came up as a key factor in enabling students to feel a part of a school, good about themselves and their place in the big scheme of things, security, well being etc. We use a college system - primarily for sport - therefore limited re pastoral support.*
- c) *Originally houses only for sport but transforming to Pastoral Care vehicle (Vertical tutor groups, peer support etc.) Seems very positive and productive.*
- d) *Houses I believe certainly engender connectedness between students of differing ages / year levels, and also for each individual student in developing a sense of belonging.*
- e) *Our school commenced with 120 students and grew to 150 students in the first year. Having been impressed with the advantages of a house system at previous schools, I wanted to introduce houses from the start. I believe that pastoral care in the primary school falls mainly within the realm of the classroom teacher. With this in mind our primary classes were not involved in our home room structure that exists for our secondary classes.  
I do believe that this is an effective structure for this purpose. It does allow for a connection with a particular secondary staff member (the home room teacher/tutor), which is particularly important for younger students. It also allows for a 'first point of contact' for parents. The role of the home room tutor/teacher is also an important aspect in the pastoral care of the individual students within each homeroom group.*

## **2. If so, how do you stage the introduction of a Pastoral Care system based on Houses?**

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this survey "new" was taken to mean less than 10 years old.

- a) Houses comprises of students vertically streamed. Senior students are selected from the older students as Captains. Teachers are allocated to the Houses. Teachers are appointed as House Head which is a promotional position dealing with welfare issues.
- b) Small School - pastoral care is based on class groups - K-4: class teacher, 5-8: Home Teacher, 9-12: Roll Call teacher. Each has a pastoral role for their group. 3 Division School - Division Meetings - Pastoral matters a part of each meeting. As well there is a core time each day for admin and group pastoral matters. Orientation for new students. "Buddy" system for Junior and Middle students - more "friends" based for seniors.
- c) Aiming to reduce Tutor groups to 18.
- d) In our Junior School we use Houses for various co-curricula activities and some curricula ones too eg literacy and numeracy 'relays'. By the Middle School [Y5] we have Pastoral Groups for students and these form into House groups
- e) We commenced with three house groups. Our Year 7 classes were divided into the three house groups for their home room. As the school progressed to Year 8 in 2003 with 340 students over K-8, we stayed with three house groups. Homeroom groups were rearranged for Year 7 & 8 so that they are vertical in nature, with each house having two home room groups.  
In 2004, with the school expecting to grow to approximately 500 students, we will add an additional house group.  
My reasons for starting with three house groups and then expanding to four groups was to allow for reasonably sized house groups for competitions in the first years of the school. We have avoided the assigning of house shirts for competition so that we will be able to reassign some students to the new house in 2004.

### **3. What pastoral care strategies (that work for small schools) still serve as they grow into large schools?**

- a) Simply, as our student numbers are small this year we only have two Houses. As the student population grows the number of Houses will increase to a number of four. Programs such as peer support and peer mentoring are still able to take place.
- b) Small Schools - easier to keep track of pastoral issues across the various teachers involved with one class/year group.  
Larger schools need a more formal system - I personally like the idea of a vertical pastoral system - Students from 5-8 or 9-12 in one Pastoral Group.  
As we move to a new School - we are considering the major issues of "Orientation" for both our existing students as well as new ones. Looking at a Year 7 & 8 Camp early in Term 1 to develop "connectedness" - bonding - friendships etc. Years 9 - 12 a program centred on enabling students to appreciate each other - acceptance - support - my part in the group, etc.
- c) Staff knowing students well, checking Diaries each week, groups as small as reasonably possible.

### **4. Do systems from large schools instantly translate to small schools?**

- a) With a bit of 'tweaking' the philosophy can.
- b) Never instantly! But they can be phased in or structures can be developed which are able to be built on as a school grows larger.
- c) Having come from a school where there were 8 house groups, it is necessary to think carefully about the number of groups. Staging the introduction of additional houses is an important process. Vertical house groups in the secondary school obviously do not work well with a school starting with just Year 7. However, as we moved to Year 8 we have changed to a vertical system and this has been very effective. The students from both Year 7 and Year 8 have enjoyed this variation and interaction between year groupings.

**5. How do you cross the Stage 3/4 divide with teachers who have no experience of middle school models?**

- a) *With regards to this our teachers are experiencing difficulty with the curriculum issues with the first time encountering primary or secondary classes. In a small school like ours with no KLA colleagues this does present a problem. Our staff work co-operatively on their programs supporting each other and seek the support of colleagues from other schools. We purchase programs when necessary.*
- b) *Give them a well chosen peer buddy, encourage team teaching, support PD such as Grade Days, spend time informally with them myself, disseminate materials on Middle Schooling e.g. succinct magazine articles.*
- c) *When advertising for staff in the first year of the school, I advertised for Secondary Core teachers - teaching a combination of subjects that I listed. After a lot of prayer, we received applications from people who fitted across the subjects very well. One of the staff members had already had middle school experience in the ACT, which has proved to be invaluable. As the school grows, we are trying to maintain core teachers in Year 7 as much as possible, in order to aid the transition process into secondary schooling.*

**6. How do you cross the Stage 3/4 divide with teachers who have no experience of K to 12 (independent) schools?**

- a) *Place the new secondary teachers on kinder playground supervision!!!*
- b) *Stage 3/4 divide - I think good primary teachers are more amenable and able to cope with 3/4 issues - curriculum and pastoral care. We do run an orientation for new staff. Also "buddy" teachers. Director of the Middle Division responsible for new staff.*
- c) *From my experience primary teachers feel uncomfortable with the secondary aspect of the College but with teacher mentoring as part of the induction and matching roles with abilities the problem is alleviated.*
- d) *I was fortunate enough to employ two secondary staff who had previous experience with primary/infants. This allowed me to assign these teachers to some of the RFF component to fill up their loads (it was a perfect fit). One of the most significant issues was playground duties. We deliberately assign secondary teachers across the playground, so that they may be supervising infants students. The biggest issue, however, has been with infants teachers supervising secondary students in the playground and getting accustomed to differences in acceptable behaviour/levels of physical activity.*
- e) *It is sometimes interesting to observe the reaction of teachers who have not had previous exposure to the independent sector. Most of my staff appointments have been people with some experience of the independent sector (either taught in independent schools or have children in independent schools). Particularly for those without any previous experience of independent schools, expectations need to be spelt out very clearly at the interview stage and it is appropriate that they be mentored by someone with experience in independent schooling.*

**7. How have you as a new head of new schools found time to provide pastoral care for staff?**

- a) *Seeing this as a high priority, I make time to chat with each staff member each week and in many cases visit their staffrooms if not their classrooms. I encourage staff members, or others [clerical staff, senior staff, my wife] to let me know of any issues, milestones, illnesses... involving staff and their families. We have a staff birthday list for morning tea celebrations*
- b) *One of the key ways in which this has been achieved is through our daily devotions/briefing session. In the first year of the school, this was an intimate group with open communication. As the staff grows, this becomes less intimate and staff are*

*less willing to share personal needs. Staff social functions are an important aspect of pastoral care which are a priority.*

**8. How do you equip people for coping with the incessant and inevitable change from year to year?**

- a) *With regards to teachers, recruiting the correct people is important and change is an expected part of the profession these days. Advanced planning and a team approach to tackle change empowers.*
- b) *For the rest of the community communicating information is critical.*
- c) *Including staff in the process, even if not in the decision making.*
- d) *Inviting them for an informal barbecue or dinner, or sending a bunch of flowers perhaps as a thank you for extra work.*  
*Pastoral care time for staff/issues re change – often difficult – more often than not it is reactive to the situation arising - poor management by me! A couple of issues we have targeted and sought to be proactive in e.g. working with new staff, helping older staff look at the issues re the change to a new school, keeping them involved, where possible, in the decision making process, etc. Informing staff in advance of what is happening has been important - letting them ask and find out about things.*
- e) *I have a very good Deputy who works effectively with staff. Demands and needs are endless, assisted by Chaplains (1.4 FTE) and Counsellor (0.5FTE – needs would justify 2!)*

**9. How have you as a new head of new school found time to provide care for your family?**

- a) *It makes it easier with my children in the school.*
- b) *Family - often suffers re time!!! Fortunately my children are all out working, grown up - easier. My wife often looks at the picture on the fridge to remind herself of me!! When home at tea time I make a point of sitting down in the kitchen and talking with my wife - leave the evening news etc. We try to do at least one thing outside our normal routine together each week - movie, have friends over etc... For younger Heads with younger families - I suggest they put in their diary a time each week after school - 4:30 or 5:00 etc a time for FAMILY!!*
- c) *Not as well as I could have, and I have a wife but without any children. I have been fortunate she has been, and still is, very involved in aspects of College life. I try not to go to school on one day [often Sunday] each week but this doesn't always work out.*
- d) *Having a Deputy and Business Manager has taken some time constraints from me e.g. locking up after Parent / Teacher, responding at 3am to security calls.....*
- e) *This is a more difficult question - having my children join the school as well has actually helped and has worked very well.*

**10. How have you as a new head of new school found time to provide pastoral care for yourself?**

- a) *The reward is in the job itself!!!*
- b) *I find a quiet time of bible reading/prayer essential each morning. I try to find time to do things for myself - walk daily, read at bed time. Sunday's are precious - church - family if possible. I am trying to make a conscious decision not to hold School things on a Sunday or if possible not to do School work on a Sunday - doesn't always work.*
- c) *Chair of Council plays pastoral role, in a very effective relationship. Time with Chaplain to discuss issues, although time is very limited.*
- d) *I have started to take time off in each holiday period for at least three to four days. I have also taken two days this [the fifth] year in term time – a day here or there before or after a conference.*
- e) *The last priority! I think that this is symptomatic of all principals!*

***Conclusion:***

What can be done to steer the development of our schools' Pastoral Care provision to ensure it keeps abreast of the growth of our school communities? The following strategies could be worthy of consideration:

- Consult but don't be afraid to make difficult decisions (get the balance right).
- Conduct staff interviews and be available for staff
- Discuss your staff's teaching programmes with them whenever possible. Join staff in their classrooms as they implement them.
- Aim for effective communication:
  - Provide opportunities for input
  - Allow staff to think that innovations or developments are their idea
  - Give staff and parents lots of notice of change
  - Explain decisions in detail and on educational/operational grounds
  - Run efficient meetings
- Make time by setting priorities – discard the unnecessary!
- Encourage staff to select mentors for professional peer support.
- Develop a Strategic Plan (for Pastoral Care and for Staffing): We have Strategic Plans for finance and infrastructure but how many of us have strategic plans for these vital aspects of our schools' operation?
- Conduct an annual Pastoral Care Audit (see Appendix).



## Appendix Pastoral Care Questionnaire

*Perspective from which you are answering this questionnaire:*

- Junior School     Middle School     Both Junior School and Middle School

### Part A: Students' Pastoral Care

*Overview: In the Junior School and for Year 6 pastoral care is the responsibility of the classroom teacher supervised by the respective Co-ordinator. In Middle School pastoral care is based on the Middle School team of teachers who meet and communicate pastoral concerns regularly. The Co-ordinator of Middle School publishes a Pastoral Care Bulletin and the House Meetings provide opportunities for more formal Pastoral Care activities. A student mentor system works on a semi-formal basis to support students who are experiencing difficulty. The House System of pastoral care was selected on the basis that it provides identity and a focus for activities beyond the classroom including sports activities, cultural pursuits and other activities in both vertical groupings and as age cohorts.*

*Aspects of this system will need to be reviewed in anticipation of the introduction of Year 9 next year. Further changes are likely to be needed as the school grows to its full complement in 2012.*

*In light of the above overview please answer the following questions: (Please explain you responses wherever necessary.)*

1. What aspects of the School's Pastoral Care provision are working well at present?

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2. What aspects of Pastoral Care are working poorly? (Please explain you response.)

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3. Describe any aspects of the pastoral care programme that are satisfactory but could be improved:

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4. Are Houses a valid avenue for developing connectedness and resilience between/in students?

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5. Outline the pastoral care strategies that work for the school at its present size that you believe will still serve as it grows into a large school:

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6. Describe the pastoral care strategies that appear to work for the school at the moment but which you believe will need to be replaced as it grows into a large school:

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7. Describe pastoral care strategies that could be needed as the School grows:

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8. What could we do to assist students as they make the transition from Stage 3 into Stage 4?

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9. What will be needed to assist students as they make the transition into Stage 5 in 2004?

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10. What strategies might assist students adapt to the changes that occur as the school grows?

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11. Please provide any other insights or suggestions for our Pastoral Care programme:

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**Part B: Pastoral Care of Staff** (*Please explain your responses wherever necessary.*)

*Background: The busy-ness of independent schools results from high expectations regarding the pursuit of a rigorous, high quality curriculum, the provision of a wide range of co-curricular and sporting activities, regular feedback and communication with parents, the enforcement of dress and behaviour standards, and general expectations regarding the accommodation of differences. These are compounded in a new school by the need to create a distinctive school culture, the effort needed to attract large numbers of new students and the demands created by growth and continual change.*

1. How can the school provide effective pastoral care for staff?

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2. Are there any aspects of the School's pastoral care of staff that are working well at present?

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3. Are there any aspects of staff pastoral care that work poorly at present?

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4. Describe any aspects of staff pastoral care that are satisfactory but could be improved:

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5. What can the school do to ameliorate the pressure on staff at key points of the school calendar?

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6. How can the school provide effective pastoral care for staff as the number of staff increases each year?

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7. What can the school do to help staff cope with the change that occurs each year as the school grows?

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8. What can the school do to support the professional development of staff (including promotion opportunities) as the school grows?

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9. Please provide any additional comments or suggestions:

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*Thank you!  
Chris Pitt*