

St. Paul's School

Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board Alliston, Ontario

CONTACT INFORMATION

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About the school ...

St. Paul's School is located in Alliston, a small town in Simcoe surrounded by farmland and, in more recent years, a centre north of the GTA for auto manufacturing. The school population of about 300 students, drawn both from town and from the outlying rural areas, represents a wide diversity of economic need. The school motto "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving" directs the course for this closely knit, faith-filled community.

The staff at St. Paul's are dedicated not just to the pursuit of academic excellence but to the personal well-being of children and their families. As a school community, St. Paul's is committed to the full inclusion of all students, taking a team approach to goal setting and school improvement.

Ongoing improvement ...

In the 2007-08 EQAO assessments, the results for St. Paul's Separate School have improved significantly in all assessments areas. Seventy-nine per cent of Grade 3 students achieved at or above the provincial standard in reading, 96 per cent in writing and 88 per cent in mathematics. On the Grade 6 assessments, between 80 and 83 per cent of the

Some Snapshots

Students ...

- are proud advocates of their school community and lead by example
- Junior/Intermediate students are responsible role models for Primary students and support learning as "reading buddies" and companions for many extracurricular activities
- present initiatives at meetings of the Catholic School Community Council

Parents ...

- appreciate open communication with the school so that that small problems never become large problems
- attend presentations to help develop an understanding not only of "what" their children are learning but also of "how" they are learning
- serve as very active and supportive volunteers throughout the school

students achieved at or above the provincial standard. These results confirm the dedication of the staff to higher levels of student learning and achievement.

Success after struggle ...

In the small town of Alliston, St. Paul's School has often been seen as "the small school across town." The building had been in ill repair for years and most recently had been deemed "prohibitive to repair." With the support of parents and community volunteers, the school received a "face lift" that included new painting and extensive ground work. The school also put into place outdoor games for students and a wide variety of additional programs. This has all come about through collaborative planning initiated by the school principal and supported by the staff, parents and parish community.

The staff identified the need to establish a respectful, proactive approach to discipline. A program was introduced that was embraced by the entire school community. Everyone on staff joined in the study and discussion of the program and identified the key principles that would contribute to a calm and empowering learning environment. These key principles were integrated into every classroom, Kindergarten to Grade 8, and the entire school team revisits them regularly.

Within the past year and a half, the school community has blossomed. The “new look,” consistent positive discipline and focused academic planning have paid great dividends. The school community has been featured many times on the district school board’s website and the students have been recognized for the quality of their work, their involvement in a wide variety of extracurricular activities and the pride they show for their school community.

The school and community are now looking forward with great anticipation to the building of their new school, which is to begin in the near future.

Teaching, learning and leading ...

Focused literacy plan. Recognizing that the success of the literacy program sets the stage for positive results in all areas of the curriculum, St. Paul’s has made the implementation of a literacy framework the cornerstone of its approach, putting into place a number of specific strategies:

- providing uninterrupted blocks of time for literacy (and numeracy) in the Primary grades
- lowering the target year to Senior Kindergarten to implement the literacy framework and using a benchmark program to provide the data required to ensure effective programming for each student
- sharing results at monthly divisional meetings where students who need more intensive support are identified

Targeted strategies to get children (and their families) reading include:

- providing students who have been identified as at risk with “three reading meals” a day – the first with the classroom teacher and the second and the third with resource staff and/or a parent volunteer
- providing professional development for parent volunteers and educational assistants on the “Language of Early Literacy” and “Reading Recovery” strategies to ensure that they are providing the best possible support for students
- creating a central library of reading resources with ample material for all reading levels and a DVD of effective practices to encourage reading at home with young children
- sending home a daily agenda that clearly outlines the reading that is required for each evening (parent signature requested)



Consistent approaches to writing have been implemented from JK to Grade 8:

- establishing daily writing as an essential component of the literacy program
- introducing an organizational tool for writing for all grades, collecting samples of student work and a binder of exemplars (for review at monthly Divisional meetings and for sharing with St. Paul’s community of schools and across the board)
- displaying student writing in classrooms and throughout the school

In-school professional learning and focused staffing. The School Improvement Plan speaks to the importance of ongoing professional learning for all staff. The model is one of inclusion: teachers, resource staff and educational assistants are part of all professional learning, as appropriate.

Leadership. The Supervisory Officer describes the principal as someone who finds leadership “wherever she lands.” The principal describes her role as finding the leaders in the school and enabling them to lead. Staff members note their appreciation for opportunities for leadership – they in turn talk about the leadership the students demonstrate.

“The principal’s spirit connects us.” *Parent*
 “This is like a family ... I know I can come and talk to all of the teachers.” *Newcomer Parent*
 “Targeting a kid’s learning needs means having to try new things.” *Teacher*
 “We’re very proud of the success we are achieving and would be honoured to share our best practices with others.” *Principal*

Moving into the future

- ◆ expand St. Paul’s repertoire of strategies for differentiating instruction and using assessment data
- ◆ share experiences with other teachers/schools who are effectively utilizing SMART Boards
- ◆ visit other classes and meet with teachers who support professional growth in a problem-solving approach to mathematics in the Junior and Intermediate divisions
- ◆ develop an “Essential Skills” document that will outline best practices and expectations for all subject areas