

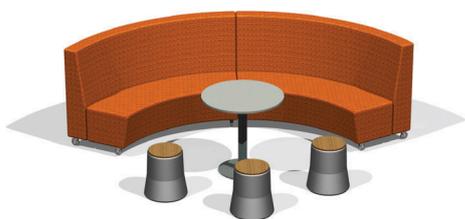


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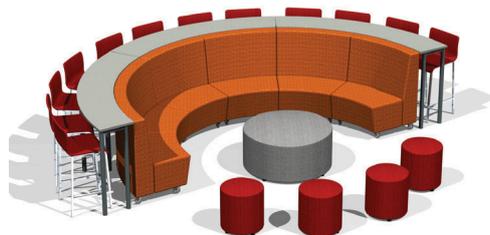
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# Learn anywhere, anyhow and anytime

*How Marist College Bendigo is nurturing independent learners, **Bill Minnis***



**D**arren McGregor says that the opportunity “to build a school on a greenfield site, with a clean slate to write on” was too good to refuse when he stepped down from the principal’s position after 10 years at Catholic College Bendigo.

He explains: “Bendigo is growing rapidly and Catholic College was bursting at the seams [with 2000 students] in 2012 when the Marist Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy – who had jointly governed the College with the Bishop since their schools merged in 1983 – agreed to separate.

“... the Brothers to build a new school, the first in 50 years to be established in Australia by a Catholic teaching order, and the Sisters to govern the College.

“The Marist tradition has always been to help

***“During breaks and lunch, as many as 40 children can be on the deck chatting and playing games...”***

the poor by educating their children, so Maiden Gully is a fitting area as it provides a school for some of the poorest families in Bendigo.”

Maiden Gully, pop. 4400, is seven km west of Bendigo’s CBD. It’s semi-rural, and although higher socio-economic families are moving, in there is significant number of very poor families in strife with unemployment, drugs, alcohol and mental health challenges.

Here the Marists have amalgamated three plots to create 13 hectares that slope up from Golf Links Road, past the Community Hub

site, to the crest of the hill where contractors are hurrying to complete the building works before the start of Term 1 2017.

I met McGregor in front of the Montagne Centre. Finished in time for the first student intake at the start of the 2015 school year, the building was joint winner in the New Construction: Major Facility category in this year’s Learning Environments Australasia Awards, the judges commenting on “...the removal of the physical barriers to learning experience in order to promote learning activity anywhere and everywhere.”

Though the teaching staff will have their own space in the Junior Years Centre, McGregor’s office will stay where it is now in the Montagne Centre, looking out onto the deck that fronts the wetland.

“During breaks and lunch, as many as 40

LearningScapes  
**E X P E R I E N C E**  
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Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

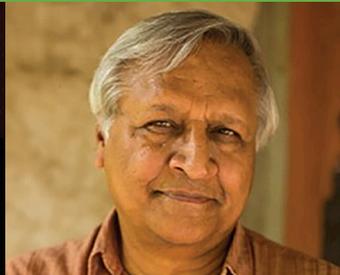
The Conference's key focus is the notion of 'experience of learning'. As Singapore is a cultural and economic gateway to Asia, the conference will explore how learning environments are evolving in this rapidly changing part of the world. Key issues such as density and urban schools, technology and innovation, collaboration and community as well as the power of the education experience to change lives will be explored. The conference will include diverse insights from leading thinkers, designers, educators, strategists and academics across various sectors, from both inside and outside of Asia.

**KEYNOTE SPEAKERS**

**MC**



Sugatra Mitra



Bunker Roy



Megan Fallone



Maxine McKew

**CONFERENCE THEME**

- Building More On Less
- Collaboration And Community
- Exploring New Learning Models: Improving Lives
- Digital Asia

**KEY SITE VISITS**

- School of The Arts
- Singapore University of Technology and Design
- GEMS World Academy
- NTU's The Hive
- TreHaus Co-Working
- Library @ Orchard
- La Salle College of the Arts

**Plan ahead for 2017 now!**

The Conference aligns with key school holidays and apart from the fantastic program of speakers, site visits and workshops, it will be an ideal opportunity to explore some of Singapore's great new learning environments and experience the amazing Marina Bay Sands and Gardens by the Bay.

For further information, contact the Conference Manager at

[ros@bccm.com.au](mailto:ros@bccm.com.au) or [info@bccm.com.au](mailto:info@bccm.com.au)

**Shaping Better Learning Environments**

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children can be on the deck chatting and playing games... my door is always open; often one will wander in to show me something they have done on or to say hello. During class time I like to walk around and talk to students about their learning.

“Our Marist learning belief is that students learn anywhere, anyhow and anytime... but traditional modes of teaching are not meeting the needs of contemporary students. The greatest frustration for educational leaders is adapting traditional spaces to suit this revolution.”

Hence the Montagne Centre with its open learning areas, facilities for classes to be indoors or outside, nooks where children can chat or be quiet, meeting rooms, conference rooms, exploration rooms and the Gastronomy Area, the latter a place where students absorb chemistry and physics while they cook... *learn anywhere, anyhow and anytime.*

The wetland provides similar learning opportunities for science and biology with aquatic plants and creatures to be collected and studied,



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## buildings and grounds



water samples taken, and the booming calls of the resident frog population proof of a well-balanced environment.

With students now enrolled in Years 7, 8 and 9, next year's intake will include Foundation and Years 5, 6 and 10. By 2019 when Year 11 students move up to their final year, the student body is forecast to reach 1500.

Reflecting the surrounding areas of Maiden Gully's generally low family incomes, the school's ICSEA value in the bottom and lower middle quarters is 60 per cent as compared to the Australian national 50 per cent.

From day one, McGregor has maintained a firm dress code, requiring all students to wear the school's uniform and wear it well. He says: "When we started, lots of the children didn't

know how to knot a tie; for many families, the school blazer is the most expensive garment they have ever bought.

"We expect our students to arrive at school well-groomed and to wear their uniform with pride."

The uniform is perhaps the most visible part of the school's ethos – where the child and his/her wellbeing is central to everything that the school does... to the extent that children from families that are in trouble are routinely picked up by school staff.

"We don't want any child to miss even one day."

The same goes for fees. Starting next year at \$2000 for Foundation and currently \$4400 plus a \$400 technology fee for Years 7–10, Marist College is modestly priced but for some parents

a job lost or an unplanned-for expense can result in missed fee instalments and when this happens, the school is ready, quietly, to help.

"We budget on collecting around 92 per cent of fees so we have a margin to spend when a family needs us."

Day by day pastoral care and supervision is based around the school's 1:14 Educators. *Note: educators not teachers.* At the start of the year, each educator is assigned a group of 14 students and meets with their group every morning for 15 minutes to discuss what's coming up and what needs to be done. At the end of the week there's a 100-minute session on Friday afternoon to evaluate what has been achieved, set personal goals and explore what is to come in the following week.

Next, every child sits down with a book of their choosing for 15 minutes of ‘Wild Reading’ which McGregor asserts is an essential part of the school’s literacy strategy and is paralleled in numeracy by *Maths Pathway*.

McGregor acknowledges that the schools’ mix of formal-traditional and educator-as-learning-facilitator can be confronting for new teachers. “quite often, after several weeks they have a ‘melt-down’ and want to retreat to their ‘I teach and you listen’ comfort zone,” McGregor comments “but, they come bouncing back and embrace what we do.

“The proof is in the number of teachers that want to work here. We have graduate teachers and others that have been in the classroom for 30 years. In our most recent recruitment drive, we received over 130 applications from well qualified teachers for the 20 positions we had to fill.”

NAPLAN data is limited to the 2015 Year 7 numbers, which are in line with or ahead of

**The Buildings’ names**

**Champagnat**  
 Founder of the Marist Brothers Marcellin Champagnat

**Fourvière**  
 Our Lady of Fourvière Shrine where Marcellin Champagnat and 12 aspirants, priests and seminarians met on 23 July 1816 to found the Society of Mary.

**Montagne**  
 16-year-old Jean-Baptiste Montagne was dying when Marcellin Champagnat was called to hear his confession. Champagnat realised that, like many young people, Montagne was a victim of his lack of education and religious knowledge.

**La Valla**  
 La Valla-en-Gier, France where Champagnat build L’Hermitage, home of the Marist Brothers.

similar schools at this point, with McGregor confident that when these students are tested in Year 9, the results will confirm the payoff of

three years of purposeful, focused and enjoyable learning.



**School and grounds**

The school and grounds extend across a sloping 13 hectare site in Maiden Gully, 7km west of Bendigo’s CBD. Y2 Architecture partner Matt Dwyer is responsible for the project’s design and construction supervision.

The main entrance is from Golf Links Road, with service access points from Patas Road. A one-lane road leads from the front gate to the carpark and the bus drop-off point. Students and visitors walk to the school’s buildings.

The buildings are grouped around the Village Green which will have a stream running through, recalling the river that flows past L’Hermitage. The main buildings are:

**The Chapel**

**La Valla** Currently a cluster of demountable classrooms. These will be roofed-over and joined to become the Junior Years centre and administration area

**Fourvière** Has been used for Year 9 classrooms during 2016 and will be converted to its planned purpose as the technology and arts centre

**Champagnat** Year 9–12 building  
*Middle Years* Year 5–6 building, beside the Montagne Centre  
*Montaigne Centre* Year 6–7 building; abuts the wetlands, an environmentally sound solution to the area’s flood-prone topography.