

Recharged and ready

Two Catholic school leaders discuss how The Brown Collective's two flagship programs have helped them recalibrate amid the growing complexity and pressures of modern education.

As he entered his fourth year as Principal of Clairvaux Catholic School, in Geelong, Victoria, Mr Brendan Flanagan knew he needed to reflect on how he was leading – and how he could continue showing up with purpose and energy.

Leading the 630-student Prep-Year 6 school is a privilege and responsibility he feels in equal measure. This is his fifth principalship in 32 years, yet the role has never been more complex and, after burning out in his previous role, he was conscious of leading in a manner that would sustain him and the school.

"It is a significant role and responsibility. We have 421 families who want the best for their children. They have made a decision to enrol their children at Clairvaux and be part of our large school community," he says. "The staff have professional and personal needs that require consideration too. There are community expectations around the school's quality of instruction as well as the school's educational reputation in the community."

At this "critical" juncture in the latter part of his career, he sought further development through the 6R Leadership Program run by The Brown Collective.

Available to current Catholic school principals with a minimum of three years' experience, it is one of The Brown Collective's flagship programs facilitated by Founder Dr Stephen Brown to support all stages of development of school leaders. Another is the Leading with Integrity for Excellence (LWIE) course on Catholic school governance, which has been running since 2017 and now has



Dr Stephen Brown facilitates the flagship 6R Leadership and LWIE programs alongside an "exceptional" faculty team.

Image: The Brown Collective

more than 1,000 graduates.

"I knew I needed to do something to make sure I stayed sharp, alert, and reflective about my practice," Mr Flanagan says. "I spoke to my coach about it, and it appealed to me because it was about my own wellbeing, and ongoing improvement of the school."

Across six phases, the 6R Leadership Program includes a mix of online and in-person workshops. Most are conducted in group settings, but each principal also receives individual executive coaching. The 6Rs include:

1 & 2. Reflection and Renewal

This phase encourages principals to step back and reflect on their values, motivations and purpose as leaders.

3. Relatedness

This highlights the importance of connection, collaboration and shared problem-solving in building strong school communities.

4. Refinement

Recognising that leadership development is ongoing, this

component focuses on developing practical leadership capabilities in areas such as communication, strategic thinking, decision making, negotiation and building positive school culture.

5. Refresh

Acknowledging significant pressures of the role, principals are encouraged to develop healthier habits and practical strategies to maintain energy, resilience and long-term enjoyment.

6. Reach Out

This encourages principals to broaden their perspective by exploring how other education systems approach leadership and innovation.

Mr Flanagan says he benefited from the candid discussions he was able to have with 25 principals from dioceses across Australia. He was also blown away by the calibre of speakers, including Ms Maggie Farrar, a respected figure in educational leadership internationally from the UK, and Dr Brown himself.

But since returning to school, it's

helped him distil what's important.

"As a principal, you don't get paid to do; you get paid to think, to strategise, and to develop the tactics needed to lead a big community," he says.

"The program has helped me create the space to ask, 'Where do we need to put our priorities? How do we think clearly about that?'. You'll never get across this job completely, so it's about delegating, dealing with what matters now, and thinking smarter about how you conduct yourself."

He found the Refresh and Refinement phases most beneficial, sharpening how he sees himself as a principal.

"It reminded me to reach out more. Principals tend to work in silos and look after their own patch," he says.

"Even today, for example, I've been away with three staff members to Clarendon College in Ballarat, which is a leader in explicit instruction. We're deliberately being open to learning from others, not closed off."

It's left him feeling revitalised and re-energised – and he believes many of his peers will benefit too.

"This program has opened my eyes to what it takes to be an effective principal today," he says. "I'm a firm believer this program should be mandated for all principals whether it be their sixth, eighth, or tenth year, because we all get to a point in our careers where we need to renew our approach."

Governance – a responsibility shared

At St Joseph's College Gregory Terrace (colloquially known as Terrace), an



Image: St Joseph's College Gregory Terrace

Ms Ralda Deoki says the practicality of the Leading with Integrity for Excellence has been a standout for her and colleagues at St Joseph's College Gregory Terrace, Brisbane.

inner-city Years 5-12 all-boys' Catholic day school in Brisbane, by the end of 2027, almost the entire leadership team would have gone through the Leading with Integrity for Excellence (LWIE) – Governance for Catholic Schools program.

Its value to the leadership team lies in how directly its principles apply to the day-to-day realities of leading a Catholic school. And as societal expectations continue to change, Catholic school leaders are under growing pressure to navigate this while remaining grounded in their mission and values.

After attending the program in 2025, Ms Ralda Deoki, Dean of Pedagogy and Learning Innovation, says it helped her and her peers realise governance doesn't belong in the realm of "principals and boards", but it's a responsibility shared across senior leaders.

The program is delivered across six modules covering governance, ethics, strategic thinking, stewardship, safety and wellbeing, and performance culture through a mix of face-to-face sessions, webinars and online learning.

"What stayed with me was the practicality [of LWIE]," Ms Deoki says. "Stephen is very good at using metaphors to explain leadership concepts. Leadership courses can be quite theoretical: it all makes sense in the workshop, but when you go back to school, it's about how you apply it."

The metaphors she recalled included the idea of leaders stepping "off the dance floor and onto the balcony" to see the bigger picture, and finding ways to bring people inside the tent, rather than leaving them outside and disengaged.

While those ideas influence her own work, other insights from the LWIE course have had practical applications at Terrace.

An example is how the school's middle leaders go about developing their strategic annual plan.

"This year we flipped it based on ideas from the LWIE course. Instead of asking, 'What are your 2026 goals?', we asked them to think about their faculty in terms of governance," she says.

"We asked: what are the risks to



Image: Clairvaux Catholic School

the effective running or delivery of your curriculum, and how are you going to mitigate them? It got them thinking much more about risk and KPIs so we could start to forecast the things that might affect faculties."

Terrace isn't immune to the complexities and risks of running a modern school: balancing community expectations, media and social media attention, Catholic values and academic rigour – all while navigating in a "post-truth" world.

"Governance becomes the way you ensure your mission and culture remain relevant, and that you can still lead effectively in that modern world," Ms Deoki says, reflecting on learnings from the LWIE program.

"It's no longer enough to state a goal, meet it and bring everyone along strategically. The world is so much more complex; leadership must be about effective governance, mitigating risk, ensuring sustainability, and enriching culture as well."

Reflecting on LWIE program, Ms Deoki says it was exceptional because it positioned senior leaders to think more broadly about what strategic leadership is and can be.

"It provided access to experts with a breadth of experience that participants could draw from," she says, "and Stephen provided the links to the realities of modern school environments." **EM**

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