

WORKING IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL

THE ESSENTIAL TOOLKIT

SAMPLE

Angelo Belmonte • Sandra Harvey • Richard Rymarz



Published in Australia by
Garratt Publishing
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave, VIC 3170
www.garrattpublishing.com.au

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Design by Guy Holt Design
Edited by Greg Hill

Cover image by iStock PeopleImages
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Printed by Tingleman Printers

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ISBN 9781922484710

Cataloguing in Publication information for this title is available from the National Library of Australia, www.nla.gov.au

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QR Codes

Working in a Catholic School is a concrete, practical unpacking of being a teacher in a Catholic school in contemporary Australia and will strongly support new or uncertain teachers. It enables one to hear, see (and almost smell and taste) the core elements of a Catholic school and for teaching religion.

Mark Edwards OMI, Bishop of Wagga Wagga

This resource shares the wisdom, experience and resource of educators who truly understand and know the joys and challenges of Catholic education. The material is presented clearly and supported with video resources and reflection activities. This amazing toolkit could form a part of the invitation to dialogue, and accompaniment of, every teacher in the Catholic school.

*Laura Avery, Faith Formation & Religious Education Officer
at National Catholic Education Commission*

Over the years, in talking to teachers and school leaders, I always get mileage from the heroic action taken by the Catholic bishops of the time in their reaction to the 1880 Public Instruction Act of Sir Henry Parkes. In my view, that was a key and defining moment in the story of Catholic schools in Australia ... WHY DID THEY DO IT ? is a question that ought to continue to guide and inspire Catholic educators.

In its authors, Angelo, Sandra, and Richard, this book has a solid underpinning of theology and history, along with an astute alignment of contemporary reality with the faith spectrum that characterises most Catholic schools.

The sub-title 'Toolkit' assures that the book is not just wall-to-wall text. Whereas the key markers of school mission and identity are a constant thread throughout, the production is invitational and enlivened with a range of the following: QR codes, videos, panels for reflection and discussion, case studies, photos, and even a smattering of cartoons

Whereas the primary target is for beginning staff in Catholic schools, the book could be a good resource for staff retreat days, as well as for occasional discussion at meetings of School Leadership Teams. Throughout, there is an articulation of the distinctive features of Catholic schools, justifying and proclaiming the reasons for their continuance as a separate sector on the landscape of Australian school education'

Br Aengus Kavanagh FSP

Working in a Catholic School is a timely and valuable tool for those within the educating ministry of the Catholic Church, and certainly for those entering it. It recognises the contemporary issues needed in teacher formation within the vast 'change of era' that Pope Francis has identified, whilst taking nothing from the past. The plain English, accessibility and photographs all illuminate the joyful possibility of what Catholic Education remains, whilst inviting young teachers into a wider understanding of what it means ... a little gem!"

*Gary Reen, Assistant Director, Leadership Team, Mission Services
Diocese of Lismore Catholic Schools Office*

This little gem, as the title suggests, is a toolkit for all those entering the education ministry with the Church. It will be a resource that will stimulate discussion within staff settings as it contains solid information in regard to theology, history and it calls all to reflect on the mission and identity of what is required of us to work, teach and lead in a Catholic School.

It is engaging in its presentation with a variety of media, challenging us to reflect on the core purpose of Catholic Schools and what we as educators are required to be and do if we are to bring the message of Jesus to those we encounter each day.

I recommend this toolkit to everyone, no matter the years of experience. It will be life-changing for you as a person and will help you better understand and fulfil your role as a teacher in a Catholic school.

Sr Margaret Flood rsj — Principal/REC

SAMPLE



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Introduction

All of us have spent time, certainly in the early years of our careers, working in Catholic schools as teachers. Furthermore – and not wanting to sound too curmudgeonly – it is true to say that we have been involved in Catholic education more generally for some time. Longevity brings with it a certain sense of perspective. After some deliberation and reflection, it is easy to note how Catholic schools and the culture that they are embedded in have changed over time. As Newman reminds us, change is inevitable so the key point is how we recognise and respond to change. This book is such a response.

The seminal insight that provides an overarching framework for better understanding the mission and identity of Catholic schools now and into the future is a recognition of the much more contested place of religion in the wider culture. This has numerous dimensions and has been very well described in a wide range of literature spanning theological and sociological perspectives. If we try to decant these changes and identify the ones that are most pertinent to Catholic schools, three interrelated observations stand out. First, as many have noted, the ‘conveyor belt’ that transported Catholics from birth to grave with clear life markers embedded in sacramental worship, has ceased to operate. In fact, it has been inoperative for some decades. Secondly, the human community that makes up Catholic education, students, parents, leaders and administrators, is now generally much more aligned with the general culture, and a clear sense of Catholic identity and mission needs to be acquired and cultured. Thirdly, and most tellingly for this book, it can no longer be assumed that many teachers, and not just younger ones, working in Catholic

schools have a high degree of familiarity with Catholic belief, ethos and practice. This is now widely-recognised across the sector. So, what is to be done?

This book offers a small, practical response to what could be called the new reality of Catholic education. We see it very much as a first step, a resource that will assist teachers to become more confident in their role in Catholic education. The book is aimed at giving a firmer cognitive foundation and awareness of some of the key markers of Catholic school mission and identity. It contains a mixture of educationally focused insights along with historical, pastoral and theological perspectives. In the future we hope that users of this book will go deeper into many of the topics raised.

DEDICATION

One of our primary goals was to provide a useful resource to assist those who are often the underappreciated stalwarts of Catholic education, namely, those in schools who are charged with working with teachers to support and form them to be more cognisant of the history, purpose and future of Catholic education. Often these people are the school based religious education or mission leaders. To these indefatigable and irreplaceable champions of Catholic education we dedicate this book.

Angelo Belmonte
Sandra Harvey
Richard Rymarz



Above: Bishop John Norton with students from Cathedral School Bathurst after receiving their First Holy Communion. Cathedral School (1841) was the first inland Catholic school to be established.

Chapter 1

Mission and Identity of Catholic Schools

Catholic schools are ecclesial entities. As such they participate in the evangelising mission of the Church and represent the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out

(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, n. 37).

Catholic schools are ecclesial communities – places of dialogue and encounter – that exist for the integral development of the human person, to better society, and to contribute to making the world more human. In this chapter we will briefly explore the various phases and changing landscape of the 200-year history of Catholic education in Australia.

Reflection

St Joseph's is a Catholic school in remote and outback Australia. It was founded by the Sisters of St Joseph more than 140 years ago, and the sisters left only a few decades ago. Since then, it has been led by a lay principal. The school has a small enrolment of about 70 students, but the number fluctuates. Most of the children enrolled are not Catholics and the parish is really struggling to stay afloat.

St Mary's is a bustling school established in the 1960s in what was then the outer fringes of Melbourne/Sydney/ Brisbane. It was set up by the local Catholic Schools Office. It now has an enrolment of over 2000 students across two campuses, with a third campus opening in two years' time. The school enrolls students from over 40 different countries of origin with a large portion coming from non-English speaking backgrounds. Two of the feeder parishes for the schools are ones dedicated to Eastern Catholics.

- What do these schools have in common?
- What sets them apart?
- How are mission and identity manifested in each school?

Catholic Schools in Australia – Brief Historical Overview

Catholic education in Australia recently celebrated its 200th anniversary. Catholic schools have long been a part of the Australian educational landscape, and there have been several phases in their history. In the period before the 1870s, schools operated in a variety of circumstances. They often had government support but were lacking a unified, centralised structure.

The next period was the time after the passage of various Colonial Education Acts which, amongst other things, removed all government funding from Catholic schools. This era was characterised by the arrival of religious orders, largely religious sisters who established and staffed schools all over the country. Catholic schools in this period reflected the population from which they drew most of their students – Irish descended working-class Catholics. In these times Catholic education adapted to changing social conditions such as those brought about by the Great Depression and the impact of the First World War.

A new era dawned after the Second World War. A key marker here was the arrival in Australia of very large numbers of migrants. As many of these were Catholics, enrolments in Catholic schools rapidly expanded, putting pressure on the schools to keep up service provision. The character of schools changed as well, reflecting greater ethnic diversity. The 1960s were another watershed as Catholic schools after more than a century once again began to receive government funding, initially from federal sources. The 1960s and 1970s were also times of great upheaval in the wider Church and in Catholic schools in the wake of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The present period, until very recently, has seen a steady increase in the number of Catholic schools and enrolments but the demographic pattern has changed. Now about a third of students in Catholic schools are non-Catholic. And among Catholics, the strong link between families, parishes and schools has been greatly weakened.

Let us thank all those
who teach in Catholic schools.
Educating is an act of love;
it's like giving life.
– Pope Francis

Reflection

Explore some of these significant documents or events that give a picture of Catholic Education in Australia over its 200-year history:

What insights have you gained?

1. Bishop's Pastoral Letter –
200 Years of Catholic
Education
<https://bit.ly/3shEiOV>



2. The Goulburn Strike
<https://bit.ly/3QKqN4g>



3. The Legacy of
Mary MacKillop
<https://bit.ly/3OzjpGo>



Mission and Identity: the Human Dimension



Zoe is a mother who has enrolled her children in the local Catholic school. She and all her family are not Catholic, but she endorses the school's approach to education. Zoe is influenced by her brother who sends his children to a Catholic school and he has had a very positive experience. She appreciates the

spiritual dimension of the school and can also easily align with the values that are expressed. Zoe feels the school is a welcoming place and one where her views are acknowledged and respected. As she puts it, 'We are all on the same side, we all want our kids to become better people!'



Mariam and her family have recently arrived in Australia as refugees. They were greatly traumatised by having to flee a war-torn homeland. Religion is a big part of their lives, and she is thankful that her children are now enrolled in a Catholic school where their faith can be nurtured and supported. 'Being Catholic is everything to us, it's what unites us and carries us through life. To come to a place where we see so many signs of faith is so reassuring,' she says. There is also the human and social aspect of the school. Mariam notes, 'We are all learning so much about what it means to be part of this country and of this community.'



Jeremy is just finishing up at his Catholic high school. He has been at Catholic schools all his life. He has enjoyed the experience and all the opportunities that it has brought: playing sport, being involved in the school band and having the chance to serve in the local

community. It has also helped him understand a little more of his background. He and his parents are, as he describes it, 'not that religious', but he comes from a background that is steeped in Catholicism. There is even a plaque at the local Church to his great grandfather who helped build it.

What do these three stories tell us about the mission and identity of Catholic schools?

Reflection

Following the stories of Zoe, Mariam, and Jeremy, what insight can we find in the following video about the inclusive nature, approach, and landscape of the contemporary Catholic school? <https://bit.ly/3KOfpA>



Activity

This activity could be used for personal reflection or for gatherings such as a staff meeting or a staff reflection day.

Watch the video on the history of Catholic schools in Australia: <https://bit.ly/45eybtj>

Ask teachers in your school to share their experiences of Catholic Schooling as a student. Do many relate to the stories shared in this video, especially being taught by religious men and women?

- Has the task of Catholic schools really changed in its 200-year history?
- What impact, if any, do you think increasing non-Catholic enrolments have had on the mission of Catholic schools?

Reflect on the significant impact Catholic Schools have had in Australia in its 200 years.



<https://bit.ly/45eybtj>

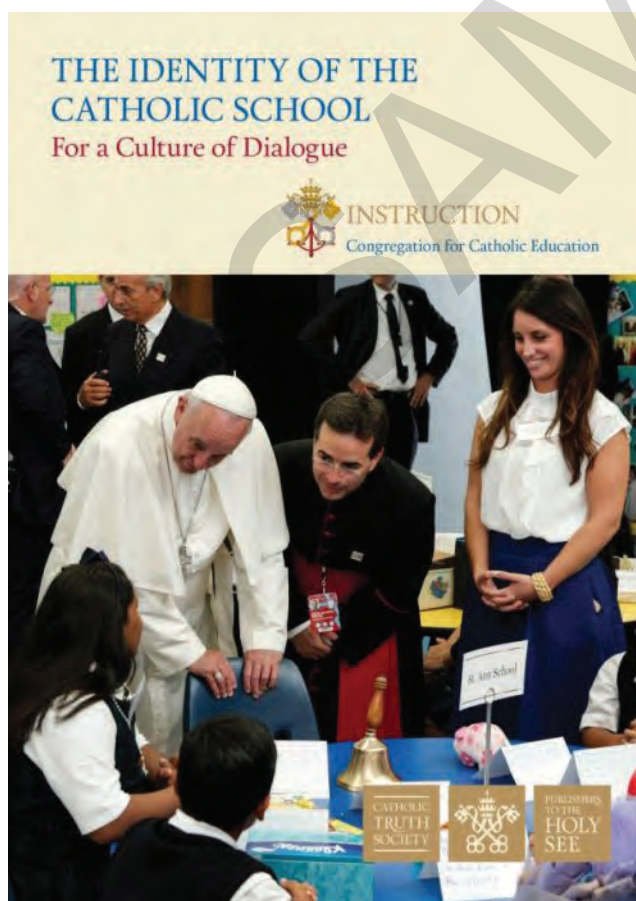


<https://bit.ly/3P1KZh0>

Teachers must aim to build an educational relationship with each student, who must feel accepted and loved for who he or she is, with all of his or her limitations and potential.
– Pope Francis

Catholic Schools: Places of Dialogue and Encounter

There is something in three stories. And there are many more stories. This tells us something about the mission and identity of a Catholic school. Catholic schools are places of welcome where human flourishing in all its dimensions is cultivated. Catholic schools are also places of evangelisation and catechesis where people can learn more about and grow in their faith. Catholic schools are places where those searching for meaning and reconnection can be accommodated. A useful rubric to better understand the mission and identity of Catholic schools today is to see them as places of encounter and dialogue. Encounter is the notion that people from a wide range of backgrounds



and perspectives can come together and share their experiences.

Dialogue is the notion that all gain from this encounter and it is most authentic when it opens people up to profound reflection and insight. This notion of dialogue provides a rationale for the centrality of the Catholic narrative in Catholic schools. What is being contributed to the dialogue by the school is the ongoing and engaging presentation of Catholic teachings, beliefs, values, and practices, as well as the witness of the school community.

The three individuals described earlier all bring something to the dialogue. For Zoe, it is her experience of living in a very secular Australia. For Mariam, it is her experience of being a refugee and having strong, enduring associations with a vibrant worshipping community. And for Jeremy, it is being part of a common experience of a looser, but still important connection with the Catholic community. From their experiences the dialogue in Catholic schools is enriched.

In summary, Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (FT) describes dialogue as:

... approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and finding common ground. All these things are summed up in the one word – ‘dialogue’. If we want to encounter and help one another, we must dialogue (FT, 198).

Mission and Identity Today: Some Source Documents

The Catholic school is an ecclesial community: that is, it is part of the wider Church and operates with the approval and endorsement of the local bishop. A good way to understand the mission and identity of Catholic schools today is to consider how it is understood in authoritative documents. Below is a quote from the Congregation of Catholic Education 2022 document, ‘The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue’.

For her part, the Church has the duty to educate, ‘especially because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all men [and women], of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in her unflinching solicitude, of assisting men to be able to come to the fullness of this life. The Church is bound

as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ.’ In this sense, the education that the Church pursues is evangelisation and care for the growth of those who are already walking towards the fullness of Christ’s life. However, the Church’s educational proposal is not only addressed to her children, but also to ‘all peoples [to promote] the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human’ (n. 13).

As stated in the same document, evangelisation and integral human development are intertwined in the Church’s educational work. In fact, the Church’s work of education:

... aims not only to ensure the maturity proper to the human person, but above all to ensure that the baptised, gradually initiated into the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of faith (p. 13).

Three different aspects of the mission and identity of Catholic schools are offered in *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, and they are:

1. Care and growth for those already walking with Christ.
2. Complete perfection of the human person.
3. Contribution to making the world more human.

Another authoritative example of the mission and identity of Catholic schools is provided in the 2021



Above: Bishop Mark Edwards addressing senior students

Pastoral Letter from the Australian Catholic Bishops commemorating the 200th anniversary of Catholic education in Australia. They draw attention to what Catholic schools are committed to:

‘We hope all our students will emerge from our schools with a deepened sense of the sacred and greater appreciation of the true, the good and the beautiful. Catholic education is steadfast in its commitment to evangelisation, catechesis, religious education, and spiritual and moral formation’ (p. 3).

Activity

In describing the Mission of Catholic schools in this video:
<https://bit.ly/45qH5DI>

- What were some key points in describing the role of a teacher in the Catholic School?
- How is teaching in a Catholic school more than just a job?
- How is the shared mission of your school important to your teaching? To other teachers? To the leadership in your school?



Reflection

- When you hear the statement, ‘I received a Catholic education,’ what does it mean to you if you attended a Catholic School? Would it be different to young people today?
- How is the student experience similar/different to when you attended a Catholic school?
- How are our contemporary graduates different to those who have attended the state school system?

Summary: Mission and Identity of Catholic Schools

Catholic schools have long been a part of the Australian educational landscape. This can be seen in the following:

- In its 200-year history, Catholic schools have seen significant phases – from receiving no funding from governments to receiving much-needed funds, to greater ethnic diversity in enrolments following the Second World War, to the present where we have weaker links to families, parishes, and schools.
- Catholic schools are places of welcome where human flourishing in all its dimensions is cultivated.
- Catholic schools are also places of evangelism and catechesis where people can learn more about and grow in their faith.
- Catholic schools are today places of encounter and dialogue.
- The 2022 Vatican document, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, notes the three aspects of the Mission and Catholic identity of schools as being:
 - Care and growth for those already walking with Christ.
 - Complete perfection of the human person.
 - Contribution to making the world more human.

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