

CHOOSING A CATHOLIC SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILD



A booklet for Parents and Carers
of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Students



LEADERSHIP | ADVOCACY | SUPPORT

HELLO AND WELCOME



Dear Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parents and Carers,

This booklet has been written for parents and families who may be thinking about choosing a Catholic school for their children.

The NSW Catholic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee is a part of the Council of Catholic School Parent NSW/ACT, and is made up of Aboriginal parents and educators who have children in Catholic schools.

We meet to discuss initiatives and projects that are happening in our dioceses, to share what's working and what's not for our kids in schools, and to look at curriculum, policies and issues impacting our kids and their learning. We pass any issues on to the State Minister for Education and we develop information guides like this one to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families.

We come from different communities from all over NSW. We are grandparents, mums, dads, aunties and uncles, and we are proud to represent the families of over 10,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Catholic schools.

Jason Allan
Chair

Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Committee

In this booklet we give you answers to some of the questions you may have about Catholic schools so that you can make an informed decision about whether to enrol your child:

- ▶ What is a Catholic school all about?
- ▶ What is the cultural and spiritual content of the religion lessons?
- ▶ Who can attend?
- ▶ How do I enrol?
- ▶ What about uniforms and fees?
- ▶ How do I prepare my child for school?
- ▶ How can I be involved in the school?
- ▶ Who do I go to at the school to discuss my child?
- ▶ How do I know how my child is going at school?
- ▶ What do I do if my child is sick?
- ▶ What do I do if my child won't go to school?
- ▶ Where can I find out about boarding schools for high school?
- ▶ Where can I find information on scholarships?



CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Catholic schools are learning communities where the dignity of each child (and parents, families, carers and staff) is respected and valued. Catholic schools strive to be spiritual, respectful and sharing places. Catholic schools see education as a partnership between parents, families and communities and the school.

Catholic Schools New South Wales (which coordinates Catholic education in NSW) works in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, teachers and principals to support students to thrive throughout school and life, and embraces the rich diversity of culture, language, spirituality and educational practice which exists across Australia's many Aboriginal Nations. You can find out more about Catholic Schools New South Wales's commitment to supporting the learning and life outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students here: <https://www.csnsw.catholic.edu.au/aboriginal-education-homepage/>

For over 200 years parents and families have entrusted their children to Catholic schools, confident that they would be receiving a distinctive education with an emphasis on children's academic and spiritual growth.

There are almost 600 Catholic schools in NSW and ACT. Mostly, Catholic schools are part of a local 'system' of schools. There are, however, 45 other schools known as Religious Institute or Ministerial PJP or Congregational schools run by religious orders such as the Marist Brothers or the Sisters of the Good Samaritan. Some Catholic schools are 'specialist schools' which are for children with various special needs ranging from learning and physical disabilities to behavioural needs.

- ▶ Catholic schools have enrolled an increasing share of Aboriginal students in NSW, up from 9.5% in 2008 to 11.6% in 2022.
- ▶ Over the same period, the proportion of Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools has increased from 1.7% to 3.8%, higher than Independent schools, but significantly lower than Government schools.

- ▶ Systemic Catholic schools remain the primary alternative to Government schools for Aboriginal students located in remote areas.
- ▶ Like all schools, Catholic schools are accountable to governments and their local communities for meeting all the teaching and learning requirements of the NSW and Federal governments.
- ▶ Catholic schools teach the same curriculum as public and independent schools and also aim to develop students' spiritual understanding and awareness through religious education and social justice activities.
- ▶ Catholic schools aim to share Catholic beliefs, values, practices and traditions within a faith-filled community of students, teachers and families.
- ▶ Catholic schools respect and celebrate Aboriginal culture and diversity

Catholic schools promote partnerships with family, parish, diocese and the Catholic Church. They offer strong Catholic spiritual values, moral and religious education, supportive curriculum, supportive environments for sporting and personal development as well as pastoral care.

Many Catholic Education Offices in dioceses have developed Aboriginal/Indigenous Education Policies to support all students and teachers in the teaching and learning of Aboriginal Perspectives and Education as well as other associated curriculum. These offices may also provide other policy information on enrolment, special needs, financial assistance, complaints, child protection, bullying and curriculum.

Catholic schools endeavour to provide a holistic and supportive learning environments to help foster and develop your child's spiritual, social, physical, academic, cultural and emotional wellbeing.





WHO CAN ENROL AT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?

Everyone is welcome at a Catholic school. Enrolment, however, depends on places being available.

When you decide to send your child to a Catholic school you are also saying that you will support the school and its values.

While any family who is prepared to support the Catholic values of the school is welcome, priority is usually given to Catholic families at enrolment time.

Catholic schools have specific programs to cater for children with special needs and/or disabilities. If your child has a special need please make an appointment to talk with the principal as soon as possible.

Gifted and talented children have above average potential in one or more areas of intellectual, creative, social or physical ability, or in one or more areas of human performance e.g. music. Please contact your school to talk with the principal for details about the programs offered.

HOW TO ENROL

Enrolment policies can be slightly different depending on where you live; generally the enrolment period for systemic schools begins around March and/or May each year for the following year. Dates for independent Catholic schools vary.

Even if you think you may have missed the enrolment period it is still worthwhile approaching the school to see if any places are available.

You can get an enrolment form by ringing the school, by going to the school office or by downloading it from the school website. If you have friends or relatives at the school, you could ask them to pick up a form for you.

As part of the enrolment process you will usually have an interview with the principal and may be asked to bring along documents like your child's birth certificate, immunisation records, baptismal certificate and sometimes academic records (for older children). Some of these documents are required by law (for example, the birth certificate) and others, like past academic records, are needed so that the school can understand your child's needs and interests and identify how the school can best support your child. It's good to be upfront about any difficulties or particular talents your child may have during these meetings.

1. Contact school for an enrolment package
2. Ask for information about Aboriginal support and programs
3. You will need to bring your child's
 - ▶ Birth certificate (your child must be five before 1 August to enrol)
 - ▶ Christening certificate
 - ▶ Immunisation evidence
 - ▶ Academic results (required by some secondary schools)
4. Complete the enrolment form prior (the year before) to enrolment day and hand it in to the school
5. Some schools may require an interview with the child and parent or carer and you will need to make an appointment
6. If you need assistance - ask at the school office or contact the AEW or Aboriginal Education Advisor

FEES

Even if you think you can't afford the fees you are still welcome at a Catholic school.

Catholic schools charge fees to cover the gap between what it costs to run the school and what governments provide through funding. These fees are kept to a minimum. Independent Catholic schools charge higher fees as they receive less government funding. If you have more than one child attending a Catholic school, the second and further children may receive fee discounts. You may need to discuss this with the school.

Throughout school life your child may need to buy a few items (e.g. a pencil case, calculator) and you may need to pay for school excursions.

Your school may also ask you to make a voluntary contribution towards the school's resources and learning programs.

Generally, there are four types of fees parents are charged:

- ▶ Tuition fees
- ▶ Resource fees
- ▶ Building and/or Parish levy
- ▶ Excursion fees

Amounts will vary depending on the school and the age group of your child, for example high school fees are generally higher than primary school fees. High schools sometimes have other fees and charges in addition to those above such as subject fees. Some high schools also offer laptop programs where individual student laptops can be leased or purchased.

School fees are compulsory in all schools and can support your school to purchase resources, sporting equipment and carry out school maintenance to assist all students.

UNIFORMS

All schools have their own uniform requirements. To keep costs down, many schools have a 'clothing pool' with new and pre-loved items. Your child's school can also tell you which shops stock the school's uniform.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The federal government provides assistance through Abstudy (<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/abstudy-living-allowance>) to eligible secondary students. Scholarships are also available through some schools, some dioceses and the federal government. If you need additional help please contact the Principal, Aboriginal Education Worker or Diocesan Aboriginal Education Advisor to make an appointment to discuss what might be available.

Please don't be worried about discussing financial assistance with fees and uniforms with the principal, parish priest or Aboriginal education advisor - they are there to help and will always protect your privacy. Remember, fees should not be a barrier to you choosing a Catholic school.

Each year, the State Government provides vouchers to help cover your child's school expenses and activities. Check out <https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/primary-and-high-school/starting-primary-school/get-help-costs/voucher-programs>. If you need additional help please contact your principal, Aboriginal education worker, Aboriginal education advisor or Service NSW (<https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/services/financial-support-students>) to find out about financial support for students.

WHAT HAPPENS AT A CATHOLIC SCHOOL

As a parent you can expect a high standard of quality Catholic education, individual care, and support from the school, Aboriginal educators and the diocesan education office.

Here are some sample schedules for typical days at primary and high school:

Typical Day: Primary School

- ▶ Prayerful gathering
- ▶ Off to class
- ▶ KLA teaching and instruction
- ▶ Peer learning
- ▶ Prayer focus
- ▶ Religious engagement
- ▶ Physical learning activities

Typical Day: High School

- ▶ Prayerful gathering
- ▶ Into class
- ▶ KLA teaching and instruction
- ▶ Physical learning activities
- ▶ Religious engagement
- ▶ Homework, projects or assignments

HOW DO I PREPARE MY CHILD FOR SCHOOL?

Things to do with your child to get them ready for school:

- ▶ Read books with and to them
- ▶ Sing nursery rhymes together
- ▶ Tell your kids stories about your experiences at school and share helpful family stories about change (moving schools, new job, new lifestyle), particularly where there are examples of feeling nervous, making mistakes, and asking for help
- ▶ Attend orientation days and open days so that your child can get used to the school and meet other students
- ▶ Practise travelling to the new school together during the holidays, so students feel confident when the school year begins
- ▶ Talk to them about what will happen at school: the classroom, what they will learn, playtime, singing and praying, using the toilets, eating lunch
- ▶ Teach them to make eye contact and to put their hand up when they want to talk in class

WHO DO I TALK TO AT THE SCHOOL ABOUT MY CHILD?

Your child's classroom teacher is the best place to start to talk about your child's progress at school.

Aboriginal educators are employed to help your child as you through the Catholic school system.

If you need assistance, ask for it.

HOW CAN I BE INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL?

Parents are the first teachers of their children. You can support your child's learning by:

- ▶ Asking your child about how they think they are going at school
- ▶ Talking to them about their day when they get home
- ▶ Meeting regularly with their teacher to talk to them about your child
- ▶ Checking your child's homework and helping them work through any difficulties
- ▶ Talking to other parents about class activities
- ▶ Become involved in classroom or school activities
- ▶ Joining the schools P&F or parent body
- ▶ Offering to help out in the classroom

You have a right to know and to understand the decisions that affect your child at school. You also have a responsibility to support the school in your child's learning and development. Parents are encouraged to be involved in the school in a number of ways:

SCHOOL BOARDS

Members are generally elected by the school community each year and meet regularly during the year. Not all schools, however, have school boards.

PARENT GROUPS

All parents and carers are members of the P&F Association and all parents are welcome to attend meetings. The best P&Fs are those that reflect the make-up of the community the school supports—so get involved! P&Fs can have a variety of names and are sometimes just known as the parent association.

COMMITTEES

If there isn't a committee in the school that meets the needs of Aboriginal parents and families, maybe you could start a new committee with the principal to look at ways to celebrate culture and parent and community involvement e.g. start a NAIDOC Committee.

REGIONAL AND STATE GROUPS

There are also opportunities to get involved at the diocesan (regional) and state level through diocesan Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational advisory committees, parent associations and bodies such as the NSW Catholic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee and the Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT.

CATHOLIC BOARDING SCHOOLS IN NSW/ACT

Boarding school is essential for some regional and remote children, especially for high school, and can also be a wonderful opportunity for some 'city kids'.

Talk about your child attending boarding school together as a family - include your child in the decision. Talk to families who have experienced it.

Families need to consider a number of things before they decide to send their child to boarding school:

- ▶ Will boarding school suit our family and our child? Keep in mind boarding is not for every child or every family!
- ▶ What opportunities will it give my child that they can't get locally?

Visit schools to find the one that best suits your child's interests, needs and talents. Make sure to ask:

- ▶ how the school celebrates culture
- ▶ how it can support your child's particular needs
- ▶ how the school supports families
- ▶ what orientation is available
- ▶ what scholarships and/or fee assistance is available
- ▶ if there is an Aboriginal education worker/s at the school
- ▶ what the school's policies/practices are in relation to discipline and allowing students to attend family functions such as funerals or cultural events

BOYS

St Ignatius College Riverview
Tambourine Bay Road, Lane Cove
www.riverview.nsw.edu.au

St Joseph's College
Mark Street, Hunters Hill
www.joeys.org

St Gregory's College
100 Badgally Road, Campbelltown
www.stgregs.nsw.edu.au

Dunlea Centre, Australia's Original Boys' Town
35A Waratah Road Engadine
<http://www.boystown.net.au>

St Stanislaus' College
Bentinck and Brilliant Streets Bathurst
(02) 6331 4177
<http://www.stannies.com/>

GIRLS

St Vincent's College
Rockwall Crescent, Potts Point
www.stvincents.nsw.edu.au

Kincoppal Rose Bay
New South Head Road, Rose Bay
www.krb.nsw.edu.au

Loreto Normanhurst
Pennant Hills Road, Normanhurst
www.loretonh.nsw.edu.au

St Scholastica's College
4 Avenue Road, Glebe
www.scholastica.nsw.edu.au

MacKillop College
Gormans Hill Road Bathurst
(02) 6338 2200
<http://mackillopbathurst.catholic.edu.au>

COEDUCATIONAL

St Paul's International College
463 Argyle Street Moss Vale NSW
<http://www.spic.nsw.edu.au/>

Red Bend Catholic College
College Road, Forbes
www.redbendcc.nsw.edu.au

St Francis de Sales Regional College
Yanco Avenue, Leeton
<http://www.sfcww.catholic.edu.au/>

Kildare Catholic High School
Coleman Street, Wagga Wagga
www.kcc.wagga.catholic.edu.au

PARENTS CHOOSE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS FOR THEIR KIDS FOR LOTS OF DIFFERENT REASONS.

Here's what they say:

'I chose the Catholic school in my town because of the programs it offers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.'

'I have a great relationship with the Aboriginal workers at my kids' school ... the teachers respect our students and work hard to make sure they learn.'

'The Catholic religion is similar to our Traditional Culture, with the Creation spirit and Bible stories, and my kids love the way they get to express their culture at school.'

'I like Catholic education because of the pastoral care and the high expectations for my children at the school. All my children went to Catholic schools and so will my grandkids.'

'There are lots of other Aboriginal families from our community at the school and we feel comfortable going up to the school because we know the Aboriginal education workers and they know our kids.'

'I send my daughters to a Catholic school because I know that they are receiving the best education and the school values and respects our Aboriginal culture.'

'We believe that the Catholic school is the best option for our children because it embraces their spirituality and the school welcomes the community to be involved in many ways.'

'Although my son was the only Indigenous student in his year, he was really happy with the amount of support he received from the school. He had numerous opportunities to attend events on behalf of the school, as well as speaking on behalf of the Indigenous students at community events. He really loved the cultural and spiritual content of the religion lessons.'

 Level 7, Angel Place, 123 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000

 www.ccsp.catholic.edu.au

 office@ccsp.catholic.edu.au

 02 9287 1514

 @cathschoolparents

ABN 31 821524 696

