

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education



Position Statement

Introduction

Catholic education in Queensland is committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Catholic schools. Queensland Catholic school authorities¹ actively contribute to the implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy. Catholic education in Queensland is also committed to the Strategy's statement that all students have the opportunity to learn about the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (Education Council, 2015, p. 5)

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission² affirms and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians with the oldest continuing cultures in human history and recognise their ongoing spiritual closeness to land, seas and waterways. (Education Council, 2015, p. 2)

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people possess a "deep rooted sacred spirituality ...that continues to encompass the richness and depth of the Sacredness of Spirituality of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the traditions of the Catholic Church." (Aunty Joan Hendriks, 2006)

Definition

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is defined as:

- the provision and ongoing development of equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and,
- the opportunity for all students to gain knowledge about the histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The Commonwealth of Australia provides a [definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#).

Rationale

Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) supports Catholic school authorities in their decision

¹ ***Catholic School Authorities***

Catholic School Authorities are the 22 incorporated entities accredited to manage, administer and operate schools under the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001*. School Authorities act in consultation with their governing Diocese or religious entity.

² ***Queensland Catholic Education Commission (the Commission):***

The Commission is a 16-member peak body established by the Bishops of Queensland. The Commission has been delegated a state-wide strategic role focussed on the co-ordination and advancement of Catholic Education in Queensland in partnership with the 22 Catholic School Authorities which administer Catholic schools in Queensland.

to provide quality Catholic schooling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

QCEC acknowledges that equal opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is achievable by improving economic and social outcomes. Education is recognised as the key pathway to improved equitable economic and social outcomes.

“All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people achieve their full learning potential, are empowered to shape their own futures, and are supported to embrace their culture and identity as Australia’s First Nations peoples.” (Education Council, 2015, p. 2)

Catholic education in Queensland in partnership with Aboriginal families and Torres Strait Islander families and their communities aims to meet the unique and diverse educational needs of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and communities.

“Education cannot be neutral. It is either positive or negative; either it enriches or it impoverishes; either it enables a person to grow or it lessens, even corrupts him. The mission of schools is to develop a sense of truth, of what is good and beautiful. And this occurs through a rich path made up of many ingredients.” (Pope Francis, 2014)

Catholic education in Queensland is committed to Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, guided by the principles of personal dignity, social justice and equity, as reflected in living the Gospel message and according to the mission of the Church. (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 1999)

Position Statement

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission advocates that Catholic school authorities in Queensland seek to deepen a respectful understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their histories, cultures and spiritualities. QCEC advocates that Catholic school authorities will work in collaborative partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, parents, community and organisations to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to have equitable access to quality Catholic education that is mutually enriching for all.

Implications

When considering the provision of quality Catholic schooling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Catholic school authorities may consider the following:

- develop policies and appropriate enrolment procedures which actively seek and encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait families to access Catholic schools, and embed inclusive curriculum practices which reflect and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, histories, cultures and spirituality
- implement appropriate pedagogies that align with current curriculum requirements to support the diverse range of Aboriginal learners and Torres Strait Islander learners
- develop strategies to improve the engagement process, achievement and wellbeing of each student
- incorporate the spirit of Reconciliation in all aspects of educational activities
- affirm the knowledge and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and encourage their contribution and participation in contemporary Catholic educational and learning community activities

- empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to gain leadership skills and transition successfully into training, employment and further education and seek to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce capacity through increased employment and professional development of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.

References

- Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholics & the Process of Reconciliation, 1999
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- Hattie, John (2009) Visible Learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement, Oxon: Routledge
- Hendriks, J. *Moving the Way Forward* The Australasian Catholic Record July 2006 Volume 83, No.3 , p. 298
- Pope Francis address (2014). Retrieved February 20, 2017, from <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-s-quotes-education-important>

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