
Position Statement

Introduction

Catholic education in Queensland is committed to nurturing and growing First Nations students for educational success informed by an understanding that *“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). This is guided by the principles of personal dignity, social justice and equity, as reflected in living the Gospel message (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 1999).

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) recognises that Australia has two distinct First Nations Peoples, Aboriginal Peoples and Zenadth Kes Peoples, each encompassing a diversity of cultural identities. QCEC celebrates and acknowledges First Australians as custodians of the oldest continuing cultures in human history and recognises the ongoing connections to land, seas and waterways (Education Council, 2015). First Nations People hold 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.” (Hendriks, 2006).

Definition

Catholic Education in Queensland places students at the heart of First Nations education including the provision of cultural and psychological safety for First Nations Peoples. First Nations education is defined as:

- Providing equitable and holistic education for First Nations students to reach their full learning potential through voice and agency.
- Strengthening key internal and external partnerships that value parents, families and community members as the first and most pivotal educators of students through authentic dialogue.
- Co-designing culturally responsive environments and opportunities for First Nations students with the ability to see themselves, their identities and cultures reflected in learning.
- Providing culturally responsive opportunities for all students to be immersed in positive learning and teaching experiences that build on the strengths of First Nations histories and cultures through the implementation of the Australian Curriculum.
- Celebrating the rich fabric of First Nations Peoples’ cultures, histories, language and identities for all students and staff in the Queensland Catholic education community.
- Advancing truth-telling, healing and reconciliation, infused through the principles of Catholic social teachings.

Rationale

Catholic School Authorities provide quality Catholic schooling for First Nations students. QCEC positions education as the key pathway to equitable economic and social outcomes. The [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) declares that “When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish” (National Constitutional Convention, 2017). QCEC supports the position outlined in [The Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#) that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, knowledge and experiences are fundamental to Australia’s social, economic and cultural wellbeing” (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019).

Catholic education in Queensland, in partnership with stakeholders aims to meet the unique and diverse educational needs of First Nations students, families and communities. Catholic School Authorities endeavour that First Nations “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).

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Catholic School Authorities in Queensland cultivates cultural responsiveness and deepen a respectful understanding and appreciation of First Nations Peoples, spiritualities, cultures and histories. Catholic School Authorities will work in collaborative partnerships with First Nations families, communities and organisations to enable students to have equitable access to quality Catholic education.

Implications

QCEC acknowledges The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration’s position that fostering access, engagement, progress, and achievement within educational performance requires strategic effort and investment (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019). Catholic School Authorities employ ethical stewardship and evidence-based practices to:

- Develop policies and appropriate enrolment procedures which actively seek and encourage First Nations families to access Catholic schools.
- Infuse inclusive curriculum practices which reflect and respect First Nations perspectives, histories, cultures and spiritualities.
- Implement appropriate pedagogies that align with current curriculum requirements to support the diverse range of First Nations learners.
- Co-create strategies to improve the engagement, achievement and wellbeing of each student.
- Incorporate truth-telling, healing and reconciliation in all aspects of education.
- Affirm the knowledge, wisdom and rich contributions of First Nations Peoples in contemporary Catholic education.
- Empower First Nations students as leaders to transition successfully into training, employment and further education.
- Advance First Nations workforce capacity through increased employment and professional development of First Nations Peoples.

References

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