



MEDIA RELEASE

Reading and spelling success makes Toowoomba Catholic Schools best in the country

Catholic school students from across the Toowoomba Diocese are leading the country in reading and spelling as a result of a three-year focussed strategy led by Education Officers from the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office.

“Across our 31 schools, we have been working to upskill teachers and teacher aids in evidence based best practice in the teaching of reading and spelling for the past three years. This has included the explicit teaching of phonics to aid spelling and reading,” said Dr Pat Coughlan, Executive Director: Catholic Schools.

“We have been discussing with interest the commentary in our national papers in the past month or so about what works best in the teaching of spelling, the programs that are being trialled in other Dioceses and reflecting on our success and the improved outcomes for students.”

With a shared goal of ensuring all students experience academic success and to have an expert teacher in every classroom, it is not surprising that such positive change has come about for staff and students alike.

“The Toowoomba Diocese now has the highest percentage of students in the upper bands and the lowest percentage of students in the lower bands in the literacy and numeracy domains of NAPLAN across State, Catholic and Independent sector primary schools. We have also become the highest performing Diocese in Australia, based on independent research from the Centre for Independent Studies, based on Year 5 NAPLAN data,” explained Dr Coughlan.

The talented Education Officers leading the program have supported nearly 1,800 teachers and school officers through professional development in and out of the classroom.

“We have invested heavily in teacher professional development including release time, coaching, modelling and feedback for teachers. We are also using additional measures other than NAPLAN to track progress and decide on the best teaching approaches for individual students. This includes the use of teacher assessment and commercial test such as PAT R and PM,” said Dr Coughlan.

With all schools knowing the required standards for each year level in reading and spelling and an expectation that 90%-95% of students in all year levels reach these benchmarks, all staff are working together towards achieving and exceeding these targets.

“Our improvement trajectory has been and continues to be exceptional, and the targets are being met. We did not wait to see what happens elsewhere; we have confidently implemented our program based on quality research and practice and our staff and students are leading the way!” stated Dr Pat Coughlan.

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Photo – Toowoomba Catholic Schools Education Officer, Sue Keefer reading to students at Sacred Heart Primary School, Cunnamulla as a part of the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Reading Improvement Strategy

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