

MEDIA RELEASE

23 February 2021

Welcoming the new school year

The community at St Brendan's Primary School in Lakes Entrance gathered to celebrate the beginning of the new school year with two significant ceremonies; a Mass, and an official Welcome to Country and Smoking ceremony.

The Mass was celebrated by Parish Priest, Fr Michael Willemsen, and attended by staff, students, their families, and local parishioners.

Principal, Mr Matthew Hamer, said staff and students at St Brendan's are excited to be back in the classroom, and to learn more about their region's rich cultural heritage.

"It was wonderful to begin the year by bringing our school community and parishioners together to celebrate Mass, which took place in our Mary MacKillop Hall," said Mr Hamer.

"Our new student school leaders did a wonderful job of presenting the prayers of the faithful. In particular we prayed for members of our community in leadership roles or those who may be in need of strength," he said.

The Smoking ceremony was led by local Elder and the school's Koorie Education Worker, Mr Narby Mullett. St Brendan's Indigenous School Captain, Xavier Pepper, played the rhythm sticks while his father, Hugh Pepper, played the didgeridoo.

"This year was the first time we have held a Smoking ceremony in addition to a liturgy. It was an uplifting experience which we will now become part of the life of our school," Mr Hamer added.

There are Aboriginal students enrolled at St Brendan's from many Aboriginal nations across Australia, and the staff are working to incorporate this vital cultural knowledge into the classroom. The school recently developed a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), and has been working on a number of projects to celebrate the local Aboriginal community, the Gunaikurnai people.

Ms Maria Kirkwood, Director of Catholic Education for the Diocese of Sale, said St Brendan's Primary School has set a strong example for local schools to follow.

"Honouring our Catholic heritage and tradition with a beginning of the year Mass for the school community is an important element of the sacramental life of the school.

"Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sale are likewise committed to walking together with the Gunaikurnai people for a better future, by promoting dialogue, and a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture and history.

"Our schools support the unique and diverse cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their parents and communities. We encourage all of our students to learn about peace and harmony in a range of cultural and communal settings," she said.

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