



Catholic Education
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Faith in the future



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Media Release

Role of parents and families highlighted during the bicentenary of Catholic education in Australia

Catholic schools across Australia will celebrate Family Week from 8 – 14 August, to recognise the significant contribution parents, carers and families have made to the foundation, growth and continuity of Catholic schools in Australia over 200 years.

Family Week coincides with the Feast Day of Australia's First Saint, Mary MacKillop, who was a passionate educator and advocate for children and families, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

National Catholic Education executive director Jacinta Collins said the bicentenary is an opportunity to acknowledge the families of the 777,000 students, and their essential role across our 1,755 Catholic school communities.

"With the tremendous support of parents and carers, including those who were lay teachers in our early schools, Catholic education has grown to serve one in five students and provide faith, excellence and access to Catholic education for millions of students," Ms Collins said.

"For nearly 75 per cent of that period families, alongside parishes and religious congregations, sustained and built schools across Australia, in large part without any government financial support.

"Today, with greater government support, our families continue to contribute through school fees and building levies to maintain and build new schools," Ms Collins said.

"Our families work in partnership with their schools in formation and learning support, volunteering, parents and friends groups, fundraising and a host of other activities that contribute to the growth and success of their children and their schools.

"The past two years have made further demands on parents and carers with long periods of home learning for many communities due to the COVID pandemic, and as we continue to face an unpredictable future, our families will be at the forefront with teachers in ensuring continuity of learning and formation for their children.

"On this milestone occasion, we acknowledge our First Nations families who were the first educators in Australia and recognise the contribution they have made over two centuries to the spirituality and cultural heritage of our schools and nation.

"Catholic education also recognises parents as the first educators of their children, and the critical role they play in fostering their child's successful learning and development."

Catholic education's peak parent body [Catholic School Parents Australia](#) (CSPA) supports Catholic school families through resources, consultation, advocacy and representation.

Father of five children and CSPA chair Karl Rodrigues said the Family Week celebrations are an important opportunity to recognise the contribution of families and demonstrates the confidence and faith parents have in Catholic schools.

“Over the past 200 years in Australia parents have chosen a Catholic education to complement the important role of families in supporting their children to grow to their fullest potential.”

“Catholic education provides a holistic education for children, one that is balanced across academic, spiritual, physical, cultural and motivational dimensions, as well as being based on respect and values,” Mr Rodrigues said.

Schools will celebrate locally in a variety of ways including liturgies and gatherings, distributing the national Prayer for families, and through student activities such as interviewing their family members, drawing a picture of their family, and learning about Mary MacKillop.

Information on Family Week is available via www.200years.catholic.edu.au

Background:

The bicentenary commemorates the anniversary of the first official Catholic school in Australia, founded in October 1820 by Irish Catholic priest Fr John Therry. The school, which Catholic historians believe was located on Hunter Street in Parramatta, taught 31 students. This school was transferred to the site of the present St Patrick’s Cathedral in 1837 and was entrusted to the care of the Marist Brothers in 1875. Parramatta Marist High School, now located in Westmead and St Patrick’s Primary, Parramatta trace their origins back to this first school.

Over 200 years, Catholic schools have educated millions of young people and today educate one in five Australian students.

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