

Unique BCE program supports women into educational leadership

The principalship dream is now a reality for four female Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) school leaders.

Catherine Connors, Sally Smith, Tricia Howard, and Jayne Solomon started the school year in their first roles as Principal at some of Brisbane's most established schools after completing the program *BCE Women Breakthrough to Principalship*.

They're celebrating their new roles this International Women's Day (March 8) after being supported by the innovative BCE program addressing barriers for women into principalship.

Unique to BCE and co-facilitated by the University of Queensland, the program encourages women to take up school principalship roles and addresses the need to increase the number of women in principalship positions across its' 146 schools.

Executive Director Dr Sally Towns praised the program which has resulted in 28 per cent of participants securing the role of principal within one year of completion.

"We're committed to ensuring women and men are both equally represented in leadership across the organisation however within our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is a commitment to improving the number of women applying for and securing leadership roles across the organisation," said Dr Towns.

"In turn, we are strengthened by a diverse workforce and inclusive practices that support and empower women to seek out and secure leadership roles."

Dr Towns said International Women's Day is "an opportunity to highlight the importance of the hiring and promotion of more women into leadership roles, keep equity in BCE's workforce, and advocating for solutions to address the barriers women face within the education sector."

Catherine Connors was awarded her first Principalship in late 2022 after completing the BCE program in the same year. She is now Principal at St Finbarr's Primary School Ashgrove and said she "never would have dreamt I would be where I am now in such a short timeframe."

"The program really validated my dreams and aspirations as a leader," Catherine said, adding that she'd started her first career in both corporate and not-for-profit organisations.

"One of the big personal turning points for me in the program was having the courage to say aloud, yes, I'd like to be a Principal and yes, I think I do have some of the skills to inspire, engage, and take a school community forward.

"It was a brilliant opportunity to be inspired by other women who are gifted leaders, and to develop connections across Brisbane Catholic Education, that I will value for years to come."

Sally Smith started in her first substantive Principalship role at Mary Immaculate Primary School Annerley this year, and said the program was an important steppingstone for her career.

"Everyone's journey to leadership is different, and after seven years in school leadership, the program affirmed that I am meant to continue to pursue principalship, giving me the confidence in my strengths and skills as a school leader," she said.

Jayne Solomon said she worked for BCE for 25 years before completing the program and starting 2023 as Principal of St Joachim's Primary School Holland Park.

"This program has really taught me I needed to put myself forward, and let BCE know I was interested in Principalship. I knew it was something I wanted to do; however, I was not expecting to land principalship so soon after completing the program," she said.

Tricia Howard called the Women Breakthrough to Principalship program "an outstanding career opportunity" that led her to her current role as Principal of Our Lady of Dolours School Mitchelton.

"The program has really opened doors for me, and I felt very privileged to be appointed to a Principal role," she said.

BCE Organisational Capability Lead Tammy McCartney said *BCE Women Breakthrough to Principalship* offered practical tools to help women take the next steps in their career and build confidence to lead schools.

"We help our aspiring leaders overcome their own barriers and obstacles, address system obstacles, and raise awareness of other systemic challenges women face in their journey to Principalship," she said.

An additional benefit of the program is that the aspiring Principals build supportive networks of likeminded women who have the same career aspirations, she added.

In 2023, BCE has enhanced the program's access, offering a self-nomination process to enrolment.

"By allowing women to put themselves forward and advocate for themselves, we continue to remove systematic barriers for women seeking Principalship," said Tammy.

Image and caption attached.

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