

Media Release

Catholic education leaders gather in Tamworth to close the gap in education

22 October 2024

Catholic education leaders, principals, staff, parents, and students will gather tomorrow for the triennial 2024 Catholic Schools NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Conference. The triennial event, jointly hosted by Catholic Schools NSW and Armidale Catholic Schools, will be held from 22 to 24 October in the heart of NSW's New England Region, Tamworth.

Throughout the three-day event, varied presentations, workshops, and on-country experiences will advance attendees' professional knowledge and skills through an understanding of Aboriginal culture and how its rich well of resources can advance the educational, cultural, and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples.

Tied together under the theme Spirit on Country—Learning Together Then, Now and Always, the conference highlights include a deep dive into the practical implications of NSW Curriculum Reform's explicit inclusion of Aboriginal histories and cultures across all syllabuses, a visit to the Myall Creek Massacre site, and keynote presentations from leading Aboriginal voices.

Guest speakers include award-winning author Dr Anita Heiss, Professor of Communications at the University of Queensland and an Ambassador for the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, Nathan Towney, Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Strategy and Leadership at the University of Newcastle, and Greg Inglis, former NRL star and founder of the Goanna Academy, Australia's first indigenous owned and designed mental health education provider.

Dallas McInerney, CEO of Catholic Schools NSW, said, 'Spirit on Country provides a special occasion for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples across the Dioceses and RI/MPJP schools in NSW to gather, connect, and learn.

'It is about bringing Australians together through education, as education plays a vital role in closing the gap. A shared appreciation of context and history creates a foundation for Australia to build a shared future in which the boundless opportunities of our great nation are available to all.

'Events such as these provide an opportunity to inspire people, and ultimately leave them well-equipped with the knowledge and skills to empower Aboriginal students.'

Regina Menz, Director of Armidale Catholic Schools, said, 'We are very excited to co-host the Catholic Schools NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Conference. The theme for the conference 'Spirit on Country: Learning Together, then, now, always' highlights the rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture found in our system of schools. It is encapsulated in the stories of elders and families in our communities who are deeply connected physically and spiritually to the land.

‘The journey to the conference has involved all 24 schools and parishes, with many students, staff, and families participating in the events. The conference will further strengthen our learning to support our young people to realise a hope-filled future.’

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Karen Tighe (Catholic Schools Subject Matter Expert: Indigenous Education K-12) is available for an interview.

About Catholic Schools NSW:

The aim and mission of Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) is to support the Bishops of NSW in bringing to life the Church’s evangelising mission through our Catholic schools. We are the peak advocate for Catholic education in NSW at the state and national level, representing 592 schools. Our role is to ensure the interests of Catholic schools are protected and promoted in forums where education policy is formed, and resource allocation is determined.

About Armidale Catholic Schools:

Armidale Catholic Schools comprises 24 schools: 19 primary schools, two central K-10 schools, and three secondary schools. We educate around 6,000 students and employ approximately 1,000 staff. Our schools are spread across a wide regional, rural, and remote geographical area in the New England and North West regions of NSW.