

10 March 2025

## **Waiben STEM partnership building a brighter future through connection**

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Waiben, in conjunction with two Catholic schools in Brisbane, has forged an innovative city-country partnership enhancing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.

As part of the program, students and staff from the three schools will connect in person and online throughout 2025 to gain valuable insights and inspiration, fostering their learning and career aspirations in STEM fields.

The partnership will be shaped by the First Nations' perspectives and the guidance of the Kaurareg Nation and Zenadth Kes Elders.

### **Reciprocal learning**

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Principal David Graham said that the partnership was a brilliant opportunity to share the rich cultural knowledge of the students at Waiben with their city peers.

"As the northernmost school in the Diocese of Cairns, our location offers unique opportunities to connect beyond the classroom," Mr Graham said.

"Our students are eager to collaborate with their peers at St Finbarr's School at Ashgrove, uniting as partners throughout Terms 2 and 3 on STEM projects aimed at making a tangible impact.

"There is great excitement within our community about the potential of supporting our students in being change agents and using STEM as a way to make a difference within the Torres Strait.

"This opportunity inspires our students to dream big about their careers while empowering them to use their talents for the benefit of the Torres Strait community.

"The innovative solutions they develop will be showcased at Brisbane Catholic Education's STEM MAD Showcase in Brisbane later this year," he said.

St Finbarr's School Principal Catherine Connors said the partnership will allow "our students to develop a deeper understanding of First Nations perspectives in STEM and across the curriculum".

"This partnership will allow our students to develop authentic relationships with peers who can share about Country and culture with them in a meaningful way," she said.

"It will help city students develop a 'heart' understanding of the importance of this learning, rather than just a 'head' understanding."

St Thomas More College at Sunnybank will also participate in the partnership.

Principal Les Conroy believes that education is about more than just knowledge – it's about empowering students to use what they've learned to make a meaningful impact in the world.

For our students, the opportunity to learn from Elders and take part in community cultural celebrations is truly invaluable," he said.

### **School exchange**

As part of the partnership, students from St Finbarr's School and St Thomas More College will embark on a special journey to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, where they'll learn from Elders, connect with local students, and immerse themselves in the vibrant Waiben community.

This unique experience will give city-based students a deeper understanding of First Nations perspectives, while working together on hands-on, student-led STEM projects that bridge knowledge and culture.

### **Peer mentoring**

St Thomas More students will mentor the students from both primary schools, also offering insights and practical tips for a smooth transition to secondary education.

The secondary students will provide regular presentations about career options, inspiring students to pursue STEM careers and make an impact in their communities.

### **Students excited**

Students at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School are excited about the opportunity to learn and work with the Brisbane students.

Scott Pearson (Year 6) said he was excited that he'll get to collaborate on STEM projects with students from St Finbarr's and St Thomas More.

"Learning from each other will help us see new possibilities for the future—maybe even careers we haven't thought about yet."

Year 6 student Periota Warriia-Pearson said "we'll be learning how technology like drones and robotics can help our communities in the Torres Strait. One day, I'd love to design a drone that could help track turtles or monitor our reefs."

Ryanjade Pedro (Year 6) was also excited.

"This program helps us see ourselves as future scientists, engineers, and innovators. It's exciting to know that the things we learn now could shape the future of our islands and beyond," he said.

The partnership is supported by the Yatha Muru Foundation and aligns with the Mpartnwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration, which envisions a world-class education system that supports every student, regardless of their location or learning challenges.

This collaboration between city and regional schools is a collaborative effort among educators dedicated to enhancing student learning and fostering cultural exchange for the greater good.

More information: David Graham,  
Principal - Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Waiben  
dgraham@cns.catholic.edu.au