

## **Mass celebrating the graduation of the 2025 Year 12 First Nations students**

Toowoomba Catholic Schools proudly celebrated the graduation of its 2025 Year 12 First Nations students with a special Mass held at St Patrick's Cathedral on Monday, 13 October.

Of the 52 First Nations students graduating this year, 31 attended the celebration, representing a diverse group of schools including St Mary's College, St Saviour's College, St Joseph's College, Good Samaritan College, St Ursula's College, Downlands College (Toowoomba), Mary MacKillop Catholic College (Highfields), St John's School (Roma), Assumption College (Warwick) and Our Lady of the Southern Cross College (Dalby).

Students were joined by proud parents, grandparents, Elders, and community members, creating an atmosphere of unity, culture and achievement.

The graduation Mass was beautifully presided over by Fr Peter Dorfield, who reflected on the value of family and community.

Dr Pat Coughlan, Executive Director: Catholic Schools, spoke to the importance of education in shaping futures.

"While they may not fully realise it yet, these young people hold a precious gift—an education that many across the world do not have access to," Dr Coughlan said.

"It is a gift to be shared, to help others achieve what they have achieved and to make the most of opportunities which come their way."

"Education is the great enabler to unlock and rise above the challenges and disadvantages which get in the way of people leading full and flourishing lives."

"Higher levels of education are associated with improved health outcomes, economic independence, and quality of life," he added.

"Each of these students carries within them their unlimited God-given potential. This celebration is not just about academic achievement—it is a recognition of their strengths and the great things they are capable of."

During the Mass, students were presented with specially designed sashes and medallions to mark this milestone.

Messages of encouragement and inspiration were shared, guiding the graduands as they prepare to take their next steps.

After the Mass, the celebration continued with an inspirational address by St Mary's College alumnus Jacob Lasserre, a proud Kamilaroi man who is in his second year of a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Secondary Education at Australian Catholic University (ACU) Brisbane.

Jacob has recently travelled to Italy after receiving the prestigious ACU Francis Xavier Conaci Scholarship, which pays tribute to the role of our First Nations in the development of Australia-Holy See relations.

“I've always been proud to represent my community and culture, and I have learnt that the world has so much to offer once you finish secondary schooling,” Jacob shared.

“I look back and realise how much I've grown since graduating two years ago. I've moved out, experienced the world, and discovered my passion for teaching.”

"My advice would be to jump on every opportunity that comes your way – it is what pushes you to do something great in the world,” said Mr Lasserre.

For the second consecutive year, UniSuper proudly sponsored merit awards recognising students for their dedication to First Nations culture and community.

The recipients - Paige McKellar (St Ursula's College, Toowoomba), Keasharn Sands-Hart (St Saviour's College, Toowoomba), Isabella Sullivan (Assumption College, Warwick), and Ruby Ferrier (St John's School, Roma) each received a share of \$500 to support their future endeavours.

Reflecting on the occasion, Paige McKellar shared, “Graduating Year 12 is not just about finishing school; it's about honouring our culture and the support of our families and community. This achievement is a step towards a brighter future for all of us.”

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