

BCE's School of Origin Exhibition

Catholic Education Week (26 July – 1 August) provides an opportunity for our communities to come together and celebrate the shared mission, values and stories that unite us. This year's theme, 'Share your light, inspire others', encourages Brisbane Catholic Education school communities to share their stories, connection to faith and community.

As part of this celebration, the School of Origin Exhibition shines a light on the rich histories and enduring legacies of schools across South East Queensland. Every Brisbane Catholic Education school has a unique origin story, shaped by faith, community, resilience and a commitment to learning. These stories are preserved through treasured artefacts, meaningful symbols and shared memories that continue to influence school identity today. From historic enrolment registers and photographs to contemporary student contributions, each item offers a glimpse into the people and moments that have helped shape Catholic education across generations.

Bringing together stories from across the system, the exhibition celebrates both the diversity and connectedness of our school communities. It honours the vision and dedication of those who laid the foundations of Catholic education, while recognising the students, staff and families who continue to write the next chapter.

Aligned with the Catholic Education Week theme, the School of Origin Exhibition invites visitors to reflect on the light that has been passed from one generation to the next, through faith, learning and community. It is a celebration of where we have come from, the values that guide us today, and the collective story that continues to inspire future generations.

Foundations built on faith and heritage

Holy Cross Primary School, Woolloowin stands as the oldest Catholic school on Brisbane's northside, celebrating 136 years of history. Images of its original building alongside its modern facilities illustrate their story, one that honours humble beginnings to now embracing contemporary learning environments. This transformation reflects not only the story of Holy Cross, but the broader evolution of Catholic education.

Similarly, St Francis Xavier School, Goodna traces its origins back to 1910 when it was established as St Patrick's Roman Catholic School. Archival photos and a Queensland Times newspaper excerpt bring this moment to life, offering a glimpse into the early days of the school's community.

At St Mary's Primary School, Beaudesert, a handwritten enrolment book, dated 19 August 1901, provides a deeply personal record of the school's beginnings. Now 125 years old, it captures the generational stories of local families, some of which still attend the school.

Symbols of belonging and community

Symbolic artefacts often reveal the heart of a school's identity.

At Good Shepherd Catholic Primary School, Springfield Lakes, a giant Shepherd's Crook sculpture adorned with ribbons was created for the school's fifth anniversary. Every visitor was invited to tie a ribbon, forming a visible representation of connection and belonging.

Sophia College, Plainland also expresses its foundation through powerful iconography. Its story is reflected in a collection of symbolic items, including a community-painted artwork depicting St Francis and the brother wolf, and a heart-shaped vessel containing rocks contributed by each foundation member. Each element represents a collective ownership and shared beginnings of the College.

At St Joseph's Kangaroo Point, a hand-crafted school cross reflects the school's dual Mercy and Josephite charism. Made from Irish Oak, Australian Silky Oak and Camphor Laurel, it symbolises the school's heritage, Catholic identity and connection to local environment.

Honouring people and legacy

Many schools commemorate the individuals who shaped their early years.

At St Bernard's School, Upper Mt Gravatt, an embroidered wall hanging features the names of the original 1955 students, hand-stitched into canvas. During the school's 70th anniversary, past students returned to reconnect with their names, a moment to honour the bridging of generations.

At St Dymphna's Primary School, Aspley, a photograph of the first enrolled student and the original admission register from 1963 captures the beginning of the school's journey, grounding today's community in its earliest moments.

Faith traditions carried forward

Faith remains central to each school's origin story. St Edward the Confessor School, Daisy Hill was founded under the influence of the Presentation Sisters, bringing with it the story of

Nano Nagle. This legacy continues with a lantern used in liturgies, symbolising guidance and faith, as well as through building names that mark the beginning and end of each student's journey.

At St Joachim's Primary School, Holland Park, a 1963 religion book and historic school badges speak to continuity in faith education. These items reveal how core teachings of love, faith, and service, have been passed through generations, reinforcing a strong sense of identity and belonging.

Growth, change and renewal

Change is an inevitable part of every school's story.

At St Kevin's School, Geelong, the beloved Mary Tree stood as a cherished symbol of the community for decades. As the campus expanded, the tree was relocated but did not survive. Today, a memorial garden stands in its place, honouring its legacy and symbolising the school's capacity for renewal and growth.

At St Mary's Primary School, Ipswich, uniform changes across its 163-year history reflect shifts in identity and community. Their 1991 uniform marks the significant moment when the girls' and boys' schools amalgamated, symbolising unity and progress.

Originally known as Kolbe College, Mt Maria College Petrie has a history that spans almost 40 years. Throughout this time, the Marist charism has been at the heart of learning, teaching, shaping the College's identity and fostering a strong sense of community grounded in the values of Saint Marcellin Champagnat.

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From 2027, Mt Maria College Petrie will become St Marcellin Catholic College. More than a change of name, this transition reflects the College's enduring connection to its Marist origins while looking confidently towards the future.

Contemporary voices shaping identity

Newer schools and colleges demonstrate how establishment of schools continue to evolve, with students, staff and families playing an active role in shaping the symbols, stories and identity of their communities.

At St Bonaventure's College, Flagstone, students played a role in designing the college uniform through a Student Voice Advisory Committee prior to opening, ensuring the community's identity was a collaboration from the outset. Marymount College, Burleigh Waters expresses its origin story through Our Lady of the Tides, a reimagined Marian artwork incorporating natural coastal elements and student creativity. This piece reflects the College's Franciscan charism and connection to place, blending tradition with contemporary expression and environmental awareness.

Stories of resilience and beginning

Some schools have particularly unique beginnings. St Benedict's Catholic Primary School, Mango Hill began with two "first days". One in borrowed classrooms at Southern Cross Catholic College during heavy rain, and another in its completed campus. This unconventional beginning highlights resilience, generosity, and the power of community even before permanent structures were established.

Together, these schools form a rich tapestry of origin stories across Brisbane Catholic Education. Each one, whether marked by historic artefacts, symbolic traditions, or shared experiences, reminds us that schools are more than buildings. They are living communities, shaped by faith, connected through generations, and continuously evolving while remaining grounded in their origins.