

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education



Position Statement

Introduction

Catholic education in Queensland is committed to achieving successful schooling outcomes for [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander](#) students in Catholic schools. Queensland Catholic School Authorities actively contribute to the implementation of the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy](#). Catholic education in Queensland is committed to providing each student with opportunities to “understand, acknowledge and celebrate the diversity and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture” (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019).

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) celebrates and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the First Australians with the oldest continuing cultures in human history and recognises their ongoing spiritual closeness to land, seas and waterways (Education Council, 2015, p. 2). Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People possess a “deep rooted sacred spirituality ...that continues to encompass the richness and depth of the Sacredness of Spirituality of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the traditions of the Catholic Church.” (Hendriks, 2006).

Definition

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is defined as:

- Working towards true reconciliation through building cultural competencies of staff
- The provision and ongoing development of equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- The opportunity for all students and staff to gain knowledge about the histories and cultures of First Nations Peoples of Australia.

Rationale

Catholic School Authorities provide quality Catholic schooling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. QCEC acknowledges that equal opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are advanced by improving economic and social outcomes. QCEC recognises the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) and the significance and intention informing the declaration that “When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish” (National Constitutional Convention, 2017). Education is recognised as the key pathway to improved equitable economic and social outcomes. QCEC supports the position outlined in The Alice Springs [\(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#) that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, knowledge and experiences are fundamental to Australia’s social, economic and cultural wellbeing” (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019).

Catholic education in Queensland, in partnership with Aboriginal families and Torres Strait Islander families and their communities, aims to meet the unique and diverse educational needs of Aboriginal

students and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and communities. Catholic School Authorities seek to ensure that “All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people achieve their full learning potential, are empowered to shape their own futures, and are supported to embrace their culture and identity as Australia’s First Nations peoples.” (Education Council, 2015, p. 2).

Catholic education in Queensland is committed to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, guided by the principles of personal dignity, social justice and equity, as reflected in living the Gospel message and according to the mission of the Church (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 1999). Education offers pathways towards reconciliation, informed by an understanding that “Education cannot be neutral. It is either positive or negative; either it enriches or it impoverishes; either it enables a person to grow or it lessens, even corrupts him. The mission of schools is to develop a sense of truth, of what is good and beautiful. And this occurs through a rich path made up of many ingredients.” (Pope Francis, 2014).

Position Statement

Catholic School Authorities in Queensland seek to further develop cultural competencies and deepen a respectful understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their spiritualities, cultures and histories. Catholic School Authorities will work in collaborative partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, parents, community and organisations to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to have equitable access to quality Catholic education that is mutually enriching for all.

Implications

QCEC acknowledges The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration’s position that fostering access, engagement, progress, and achievement within educational performance requires strategic effort and investment (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019). When considering the provision of quality Catholic schooling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Catholic School Authorities may consider the following:

- Develop policies and appropriate enrolment procedures which actively seek and encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to access Catholic schools
- Embed inclusive curriculum practices which reflect and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, histories, cultures and spiritualities
- Implement appropriate pedagogies that align with current curriculum requirements to support the diverse range of Aboriginal learners and Torres Strait Islander learners
- Develop strategies to improve the engagement, achievement and wellbeing of each student
- Incorporate the spirit of reconciliation in all aspects of educational activities
- Affirm the knowledge and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and encourage their contribution and participation in contemporary Catholic educational and learning community activities
- Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to gain leadership skills and transition successfully into training, employment and further education
- Seek to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce capacity through increased employment and professional development of Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

References

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