Welcome to the 2010 School Year
A Letter to Parents of Students in Catholic Schools

Stephen Elder
Director of Catholic Education

Dear Parents

I hope that the beginning of a new year in Catholic education has been a happy and positive time for your family. To those families who are beginning their journey in Catholic education, I trust you will find our schools are both diverse and inclusive in culture. They are creative and sustained in their learning, and vibrant places where God’s word is proclaimed and the Catholic tradition is lived.

Catholic schools provide a unique and distinctive learning environment where values and respect nurture happy, well-adjusted students. Our schools, with faith development at their core, focus on the holistic development of your child to help foster confidence and self esteem.

Achievement in Catholic Schools

While these values are widely recognised as synonymous with Catholic education, we should also recognise the academic achievements of our schools. The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an Australia-wide testing program of literacy and numeracy for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NAPLAN provides the data for calculation of national minimum standard achievement across five domains (Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation and Numeracy).

Again in 2009 Victorian Catholic schools were leading the way, achieving higher than all Victorian schools in all domains.

VCE and VET results also confirmed the strength of our Melbourne Catholic secondary schools across a number of measures:

- A total of 97 per cent of our schools had a median study score at or above the average range (28–32).
- All schools had satisfactory VCE completion rates of at least 97 per cent.
- More than 88 per cent of schools had high rates of satisfactory completion in VET (i.e. at least 75 per cent of units passed).
- More than 75 per cent of students undertook tertiary studies or further education and training after Year 12.

Improved School Facilities

These academic results are even more satisfying when we consider that Government funding levels have forced Catholic schools to do more with less than their state and independent counterparts. However, a number of recent initiatives have allowed us to bridge this gap:

- The Building the Education Revolution has provided an $860 million investment into our schools, enabling them to build state of the art facilities. The work of our principals, parish priests and school communities in building well-designed projects has lead the nation and this has been recognised at the highest levels of the Australian Government.
At the end of the 2009 school year the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd successfully negotiated a $1.4 billion funding agreement with the Victorian government which will deliver an extra $274 million to our school over the next four years. Through this agreement the State government has recognised that Victorian parents have the right to choose a non-government education for their child without being financially disadvantaged, and we thank them for this commitment. However it falls short of our goal of Victorian Government funding equivalent to 25% of the cost of education in a government school, and we will work with the government over the next 12 months towards achieving this outcome.

In 2010 your school will also see the benefits of a new national broadband network, linking Catholic schools across the country. By mid-year this $146 million network will provide Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne with high-speed fibre optic internet links. This means our schools will be leading the way in the provision of information and communication technologies.

Against this backdrop we have been operating in a new era of increased government accountability. In Victoria the State Register provides the annual reports of all Victorian schools and a summary of what schools are doing to improve student outcomes. An initiative of the federal Government is the My School website <www.myschool.edu.au>, which allows you to compare the performance of your child’s school with the average performance of all schools across Australia, as well as against statistically similar schools. Catholic schools have long held themselves to the highest of accountability standards. The Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) and Catholic schools remain fully committed to well-established school improvement processes and to providing parents with clear and valid information on students’ achievements.

Another initiative that the CEOM values highly is our commitment to creating sustainable communities and in 2009 celebrated the beginning of a new partnership with Sustainability Victoria. Catholic schools are taking the lead in their communities with developing and implementing Education for Sustainability programs into their curriculum and guiding students along their own journeys towards sustainability. Our work in this area is of vital importance if we are to live as true stewards of the earth.

But of course Catholic Education is about much more than initiatives, facilities and government accountability. Indeed, it is appropriate that the theme for Catholic Education Week in 2010 is ‘Called to Bring Hope’. Catholic schools bring hope: through their educational practices which prepare our students to take their place in the world; through their commitment to the development and the recognition of the dignity of all human beings; through their witness to the call of the gospels to bring about the reign of God in the world. Catholic Education Week 2010 occurs from 13–19 March and during this time there will be opportunities for you and your child to learn more about the proud history of Catholic education and your child’s school, as well as attend one of the events. These include the St Patrick’s Mass for Schools followed by the annual concert in the Fitzroy Gardens, and the Visual Arts Exhibition.

I am sure that this year our schools will continue to provide excellence in education and a witness to faith. I wish you and your child every success and happiness for 2010.

Stephen Elder
Director of Catholic Education