TO THE
2014
SCHOOL
YEAR

Dear Parents,

Welcome to all our new students and families to a Catholic school in 2014, and to all our children and parents returning to a Catholic school this year, thank you for your ongoing commitment and involvement in Catholic education.

We consider it a great honour and privilege to be given the opportunity to shape and be part of your child’s life-defining journey of faith and education. In return we are committed to attracting and retaining the highest quality teachers and staff to support their education, and building a strong community of faith and hope in each and every school. We know choosing the right school for your child is a big decision, and we will honour that trust through our efforts in delivering a vibrant and contemporary Catholic learning community through your chosen school.

This year we have around 12,000 new Prep students joining us across our 329 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, including our newest Catholic school St Mary of the Cross Primary School in Point Cook which opened its doors this year to more than 150 new students. The school is one of 13 we are building over the next 10 years as part of the biggest expansion in Catholic education since the 1970s.

Just recently, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released its latest school data showing student growth in Catholic schools in Victoria outpacing public and private schools (‘Parents give Catholic schools top marks’, Herald Sun, 7 February 2014).

The growing demand of recent years from parents wanting to enrol their children in Catholic schools is certainly unprecedented. In response, we are focused on building more schools in areas where they are most needed, to ensure parents have the choice of education they want for their children.

Students in Catholic schools in Victoria represent nearly a quarter of all enrolments in Victorian schools. We represent the sixth-largest education system in Australia, in the third-largest Catholic diocese in the world. We have over 149,000 students in our schools, supported by more than 16,700 teaching and non-teaching staff. As part of our Catholic education community, you belong to one of the largest and strongest schooling systems in Australia.

An important part of our mission in Catholic education is to build strong partnerships between teachers and parents that support each child’s education and ability to become an engaged, purposeful and successful learner – and to grow into an individual with commitment, passion and compassion to shape a better world for the common good.

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Your own role in the education of your child is vital. After all, parents are the first and lifelong educators of our children. I encourage you to be actively involved in their interests and education, and take advantage of the opportunities that exist through your school community to support your child’s wellbeing and learning.

Education will always exist against a backdrop of complex issues and expectations, and despite the great work being done in Catholic education, our schools do still face some significant challenges.

Across Australia, students in Catholic schools still receive considerably less government funding per child than those in government schools. Even with school fees included, we must educate our students on around 90 per cent of the cost of education in a Victorian government school, and this does present an ongoing challenge for our sector.

In 2014, we have a busy year ahead with the introduction of a new national school funding model and review of the school curriculum. Here in Victoria, Catholic education is working with the Victorian government to finalise our share in state school funding arrangements, and of course, this is the year of our next state election.

There is much to look forward to and I know our schools and teachers are looking forward to working with you to provide an outstanding Catholic education for your child that integrates faith, life and culture.

I encourage you to take an active role in your child’s education, and in your school community, which will bring rewards not only for your child but for your family too. It is through the spirit of partnership and community that we can achieve the best outcomes for our children and give them the greatest opportunity to develop their full and unique potential.

My best wishes for the year to come.

Stephen Elder
Executive Director of Catholic Education

As Melbourne continues to grow, Catholic schools are responding to record demand from parents wanting the choice to send their child to a Catholic school.

And with this expansion set to continue, Catholic education is well placed to respond to demand, building new schools in the heart of Melbourne’s new communities.

In recent years, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) has been strategically mapping out where and when to build new Catholic schools to meet escalating demand. According to the anticipated growth of population and associated State planning, 75 new Catholic schools – 58 primary and 17 secondary – will need to be built in the Archdiocese of Melbourne by 2034 to meet future needs.

Executive Director of Catholic Education, Stephen Elder, said new schools were especially needed in rapid growth corridors where populations were evolving or expanding.

‘Now is a pivotal time in the history of Catholic education in Melbourne as we rise to the challenge of this growth,’ Mr Elder said. ‘Last year we opened St Mary of the Cross Mackillop Primary School in Epping North, and this year we’ve launched St Mary of the Cross in Point Cook.’

Three more schools will be opened in 2015 – St Paul the Apostle Catholic Primary School in Doreen, St Clare’s Catholic Primary School in Truganina and St John the Apostle Catholic Primary School in Tarneit West – and in 2016 a new primary school in Wallan will also open.

This year more than 150 children have started at the new St Mary of the Cross Primary School in Point Cook. Principal Leon Colla has 32 years of experience working in Catholic education, and has run several schools in Melbourne’s west. He relished the opportunity to lead the construction and fit-out of a new school in one of Melbourne’s fastest growing suburbs.

‘It was professionally invigorating to work so closely with builders and architects, and be able to visualise how we could deliver education in our...
school a bit differently,’ he said. ‘It’s not often you get to create a completely modern facility that supports the way research tells us children learn best, and we’ve immediately noticed how inquisitive and interactive the children are with each other and their teachers in this environment.’

The open plan set-up includes a variety of areas to facilitate different activities such as reading, writing, art, play, group lessons and student presentations. There are also special-purpose rooms including a dedicated performing arts studio, kitchen, storage rooms, a staff work area and meeting rooms. But if you go looking for the principal’s office, you won’t find one.

‘No, I don’t have an office because that’s not what I wanted,’ Mr Colla said. ‘I sit at a desk in the open plan area with everybody else, so the children and teachers can access me whenever they need to and I can get involved in whatever’s going on throughout the day. It’s wonderful to have the kids walk past me and say “Hi Mr Colla” so naturally, and I’m getting to know each of them much faster too because I’m right there amongst them all every day.’

Mr Colla said he wasn’t the only one excited about the challenge of establishing a new school community.

‘From day one we’ve had parents wanting to be actively involved in setting things up. They want to feel part of how the school community develops and if the first few weeks are anything to go by, we are going to be a very motivated, connected and happy school.’

As the founding principal of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop in Epping North a year ago, Geraldine Dalton has embarked on her second year at the helm.

‘It’s hard to believe this time last year our school was being officially opened by Archbishop Denis Hart and the Federal Member for McEwen,’ she said. ‘Everything was so new for us – new students, new families, new staff, new buildings, new challenges and new hopes.

‘A year on, our small but growing community has already developed a strong bond and shared some very special celebrations including our first St Mary MacKillop feast day on 8 August last year.’

Mrs Dalton said the school’s farmland setting was a real asset for the children to experience their ‘natural playground’.

‘On any particular day you can find students exploring the rocky outcrops, listening to frogs or making creative inventions from native treasures they’ve found,’ she said. ‘We’ve laid a strong foundation for the community of Epping North and it’s been a unique and wonderful opportunity to be able to build something from the start.’

Mr Elder said that while population growth in areas like Point Cook was a major driver in the demand for new schools across Melbourne, providing school choice for all parents was still the top priority for Catholic education.

‘Our parents value an education that considers the needs and potential of their child as a whole person that extends beyond their academic results.’
The Catholic Education Office Melbourne will host a Catholic Schools performing arts extravaganza called *A Time to Shine* on 13 September 2014 at The Palais Theatre in St Kilda.

The event will showcase the artistic talents of up to 450 secondary students from Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne and will highlight Catholic education’s strong commitment to the performing arts.

Our students will feature as dancers, musicians and singers in *A Time to Shine*, a high-calibre artistic production staged as matinée and evening shows.

**A TIME TO SHINE**
13 September 2014
Palais Theatre, St Kilda
Matinée/Evening Shows
Tickets will be on sale from mid-year via the Ticketmaster website.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**
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