

A Statement of Principles Regarding Catholic Education

The task of the Catholic school

Its task is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian.

(Congregation for Catholic Education *The Catholic School*, 1977)

This same goal is expressed by the Victorian Catholic community which desires its schools to be communities of faith.

This broad philosophical stance reveals a concern for an education that combines sound knowledge and skills with an overall personal development rooted in Christian values. Such an education involves a high level of interpersonal transaction between staff and pupils.

Pope John Paul II has spelt out key implications of this for staff who work in Catholic schools:

The Church looks upon you as co-workers with an important measure of shared responsibility...To you it is given to create the future and give it direction by offering to your students a set of values with which to assess their newly discovered knowledge...[The changing times] demand that educators be open to new cultural influences and interpret them for young pupils in the light of Christian faith. You are called to bring professional competence and a high standard of excellence to your teaching...But your responsibilities make demands on you that go far beyond the need for professional skills and competence...Through you, as through a clear window on a summer day, students must come to see and know the richness and joy of a life lived in accordance with Christ's teaching, in response to his challenging demands. To teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is this latter lesson which tends to last the longest.

(Pope John Paul II, Address to Catholic Educators, September 12, 1984)

Pope John Paul II clarified this further when he spoke on Catholic education in Melbourne:

I welcome you into that chosen group called by the Church to educate young Catholics in the faith. In a very special way, you share in the Church's mission of proclaiming the good news of salvation. Not all of you may be teaching catechetics but if you are on the staff of a Catholic school, it is expected, and it is of the utmost importance, that you should support the whole of the Church's teaching and bear witness to it in your daily lives...Certainly your work demands professionalism, but it also demands something more. Your professionalism as teachers involves tasks that are linked to your Baptism and to your own commitment in faith. No matter what subject you teach, it is part of your responsibility to lead your pupils more fully into the mystery of Christ and the living tradition of the Church...The parish primary school, where younger children receive their early lessons in the faith, remains a cornerstone of the pastoral care of Australian Catholic people. Here the community of faith hands on the timely message of Jesus Christ to its youngest members...More difficult challenges face the Catholic secondary school. Here students must be helped to achieve that integration of faith and authentic culture which is necessary for believers in today's world. But they must also be helped to recognise and reject false cultural values which are contrary to the Gospel.

(Pope John Paul II, Address on Catholic Education, November 28, 1986)

This philosophy of Catholic education, expressed in a growing number of documents and policy statements over the last decade, guides the Catholic school in its functioning. The Catholic school is accountable to the general community for the provision of quality education to young citizens and is also accountable to the Church community for providing this within the context of the Gospel and its values as expressed in Catholic doctrine. The Catholic school is more than an educative institution: it is a key part of the Church, and an essential element in the Church's mission. So too staff in the Catholic school are more than employees – they minister in the name of the Church and of the Gospel.

All staff in the Catholic school have an indispensable role to play. It is expected of all employed in a Catholic school that they:

- a) Accept the Catholic educational philosophy of the school;
- b) Develop and maintain an adequate understanding of those aspects of Catholic teaching that touch upon their subject areas and other aspects of their work;
- c) By their teaching and other work and by personal example, strive to help students to understand, accept and appreciate Catholic teaching and values;
- d) Avoid, whether by word, action or public lifestyle, influence upon students that is contrary to the teaching and values of the Church community in whose name they act;
- e) Comply with the accreditation policy of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) to teach in a Catholic school and other CECV policies;
- f) Be committed to regular ongoing professional development;
- g) Be qualified as required by state authorities.