



17 February 2021
Media Release

Catholic education in Australia celebrates 200 years

In 2021, Australian Catholic education celebrates 200 years of Catholic schooling in this country.

A virtual launch of the bicentennial celebrations will be streamed for Catholic school communities across Australia on **Thursday 18 February 2021 at 10am and 2pm AEDT**, followed by a:

Media conference
Thursday 18 February 2021 at 10.30am
Level 5 Polding Centre
133 Liverpool Street Sydney

The virtual launch will include students from St Patrick's Primary and Parramatta Marist schools in the Diocese of Parramatta. These schools have linkages to the first Catholic school opened on Hunter Street in Parramatta in October 1820.

Today, there are 1,751 Catholic schools educating 768,000 students and employing 98,000 staff. Nearly 40 per cent of Catholic schools are located outside of metropolitan cities in regional, rural and remote communities.

National Catholic education Executive Director Jacinta Collins said the bicentennial celebrations recognise the enormous contribution of Catholic schools in Australia.

"Over 200 years Catholic schools have educated millions of Australian students," Ms Collins said. "We have grown alongside the government sector in ensuring the education of generations of young people, and have contributed to the development of individuals, local communities, and the economic and social fabric of this nation."

"Australian Catholic schools have a long and proud tradition of delivering high-quality, faith-based education. Our graduates have made, and continue to make, a significant contribution in business, civic and public life, sport, performing and creative arts, community services, and all facets of society.

"The bicentenary is an opportunity to celebrate those who have served in Catholic education since its earliest days; the contribution of religious institutes, clergy and lay people in the foundation of schools in cities, rural and remote parts of Australia; and the continuity of this mission with the leaders, staff, families and the wider Church community today. We look forward with great hope and faith in the future of Catholic schools by continuing to respond to our mission of meeting the educational and spiritual needs of young people and our communities.

"As we celebrate 200 years of Catholic education in Australia, we recognise and pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Australians and first educators of this land. They have educated their children for tens of thousands of

years and make a significant and valued contribution to our school communities and the cultural and spiritual heritage of Australia.

“We also acknowledge that throughout our 200-year history we have not always lived up to our mission to safeguard the wellbeing of the children and young people in our care. We recognise these failings and are committed to ensure Catholic schools are safe and life-giving places for all students.”

National Catholic Education Commission Chair Nicholas Moore said Catholic education has grown over two centuries into the largest school sector outside of government.

“It’s a remarkable achievement that Catholic education has successfully responded to meet the needs of Australia’s changing population, and economic and social circumstances over 200 years.”

“We have been fortunate that successive governments in the last six decades have supported the choice of faith-based schooling for families, and have provided significant government funding to Catholic school communities. We also acknowledge the contribution of the Catholic community, particularly our parents, who have contributed to the establishment of schools and their children’s education through school fees and fundraising.

“As we celebrate this significant milestone, it’s timely to take stock of all that has been achieved and to look ahead to identify how we can better deliver an excellent standard of Catholic schooling for generations of young people to come,” Mr Moore said. “We will continue respond to all those who seek our services and support in Catholic schools.”

Background

The bicentenary commemorates the anniversary of the first official Catholic school in Australia, founded in October 1820 by Irish Catholic priest Fr John Therry. The school, which Catholic historians believe was located on Hunter Street in Parramatta, taught 31 students. An Irish Catholic convict George Marley (also identified as George Morley), who was sent to the colony, opened the school for Fr Therry and ran it for three years.

This school was transferred to the site of the present St Patrick’s Cathedral in 1837 and was entrusted to the care of the Marist Brothers in 1875. Parramatta Marist High School, now located in Westmead and St Patrick’s Primary, Parramatta trace their origins back to this first school. There were said to be at least two other Catholic schools operating in New South Wales before the school opened by George Marley, however both schools were closed by 1818.

Available for interview:

Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP and Jacinta Collins and photo opportunities at Parramatta schools.

Media enquiries:

CONTACT: NCEC Media Tel + 61 2 8229 0800 • ncecmedia@ncec.catholic.edu.au

200 YEARS CELEBRATION PARTNERS

PRINCIPAL PARTNERS



GOLD PARTNER

