FROM THE DIRECTOR

National Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week provided an important opportunity for us to reflect together as a sector on a range of Indigenous issues.

Our schools commemorated the week with many meaningful and powerful activities that acknowledge the importance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people walking together to shape a better future for us as a nation.

Earlier this year Catholic Education SA (CESA) hosted the Hundred Languages of Children: a Narrative of the Possible Exhibition, an international travelling exhibition that tells the story of the Italian-based Reggio Emilia educational experience.

The feedback and messages left by the 1,000 visitors to the exhibition clearly demonstrates that the exhibition was a source of inspiration for those who experienced it. Comments describe delight and marvel at the potential of children from the youngest age and have left people wondering about their own role as a parent, educator, grandparent, aunty or uncle in providing other opportunities to help children realise their competence.

The recently released Continuous Improvement Framework for Catholic Schools in South Australia has provided a common framework in our sector for each school to engage in the ongoing work of improvement in their own unique context. The Framework is described in greater detail later in this bulletin so I will mention only one of the domains here – the Catholic Identity domain. We recently focused on one aspect of the domain during a session where Principals worked with Fr Denis Edwards to reflect on key themes in The Gospel of Joy – a landmark document written by Pope Francis.

Pope Francis distinguishes between ‘pleasure’ and ‘joy’ in his Apostolic Exhortation. Whenever we allow ourselves to become caught up in ourselves, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor and God’s voice is no longer heard. God’s will for us is to live a fulfilled and joyous life. We find this life in the Spirit as we deepen our relationship with the person of Jesus. When we lose ourselves in our faith, we find ourselves connected to the wellbeing of others and the world in new ways. This leads us into a new concern for those who are poor and the welfare of all of creation.

My hope for us as a community is that we find many and varied ways to experience the deep joy that lies at the heart of the vision of Catholic faith opened up by Pope Francis in “The Gospel of Joy”.

Dr Paul Sharkey
Director of Catholic Education SA
Catholic Education SA, in partnership with parents, seeks to nurture the uniqueness of each child by enhancing learning and supporting the development of relationships to live their faith in the spirit of Jesus the child, the adult, the Christ.

When we observe children we see the essence of what it means to be human. They are made in the image of God, individuals with their unique potentials. The increasing body of research consistently highlights the importance of the early years of life, recognising that children are born equipped with the desire and tools for learning, in their continual search for meaning and connection.

Currently, a small group of representatives from our schools meets regularly with the Reverend Dr James Mc Evoy from the Australian Catholic University, which now has a base at the Catholic Education Office in George Street Thebarton. This group is participating in a theological study of childhood. The aim is to prepare a paper on the theology of childhood, which will be shared for consultation within and across our school communities.

School and parish communities along with the Catholic Education Office are invited to join in the many activities aimed to bring us together in conversation and reflection. What is our image and understanding of childhood, why is the topic of childhood important to learning and wellbeing and what are our responsibilities? These are some of the questions that are being explored.

In May, Catholic Education SA hosted an exhibition in SA Water House, along with partners from TAFE SA, Department for Education and Child Development, Reggio Australia Information Exchange and Early Childhood Organisation, SA, the Hundred Languages of Children: a narrative of the possible. 1000 people visited the exhibition including parents and families from our school communities. It is an inspiring exhibition showing the potentials of children from a very young age.

Re-imagining Childhood

Catholic Education SA continues to express its commitment to children and their families through its own theological and educational research as well as strategically exploring possibilities for offering services to children and their families in the early years.

As educators our role is to create contexts, environments, strategies and relationships that will best support children to expand their potential placing great value on children’s ability to relate to others and to the world and in their desire to learn.

Education and care in early childhood is important to us all. Observing and listening to children’s learning not only helps us to understand the child who is present in that moment, but it also helps us to understand learning and how children learn and grow.

Children are curious and it is curiosity and the search for meaning that drives learning. Observing and listening to find out what a child is thinking or what they have just discovered, we discover that children are both the source and constructors of knowledge and meaning.

Over the last two years, teachers from long day care centres, preschools and primary schools have come together through an early childhood network to deepen their knowledge of how children in the early years learn and of how to best create contexts and strategies for teaching and learning and to increase their advocacy for children and their families.

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Following the success of Catholic Education SA’s participation in the Carla Rinaldi Re-imagining Childhood Thinkers in Residence program 2012-2013, 2014 has been dedicated to the topic of childhood through the initiative CESA Re-imagining Childhood.
CATHOLIC EDUCATION WEEK IN THE PORT PIRIE DIOCESE

Thirteen Catholic schools and colleges across the Port Pirie Diocese celebrated Catholic Education Week between 16th and 23rd May. While each community celebrated in its own unique way, all schools took positive action against global warming by switching off school lights for a full day on Thursday, May 22. Additionally all schools decided on a combined fundraising campaign with over 4000 students gathering a ruler length of coins to make a coin line that is over 1km long! This kilometre of coins will support the work of Caritas Australia which has been operating for 50 years to support those who are in need.

Director of Catholic Education in the Diocese of Port Pirie Ms Brenda Keenan sees that it is a privilege to celebrate Catholic education each and every day.

“I see countless examples of students, teachers, support staff, volunteers, parents and parishioners putting their faith into action, living our Catholic values and celebrating who we are as a Catholic community,” she said. Brenda added that Catholic Education Week was a time to give thanks and to celebrate.

For more information visit Port Pirie Catholic Education SA website: www.cesapp.catholic.edu.au

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF) which was launched earlier this year provides an evidence-based systematic approach for designing, implementing, monitoring and reporting school improvement. The framework offers schools a tool for self-review and planning which is consistent across the system and able to be externally validated.

The CIF is a key area of focus for Principal Consultants’ work with principals and a range of activities are planned that will enhance principals’ leadership of review and improvement in their schools. Throughout 2014 and 2015 further development of the framework will take place including the development of an online version. This is a futures-focussed framework which is both school based and student centred. It supports partnership and capacity building.

The framework is organised into nine areas which describe the characteristics of high performing, high quality schools: Catholic Identity, Focused vision and goals, Strong leadership, High expectations of all, High quality teaching and learning, Effective use of data, Orderly and safe learning environments, Strong home/school/community engagement and Effective administration and resourcing.

Catholic Education in South Australia is confident that the Continuous Improvement Framework will assist schools and the system to focus on quality teaching and learning. Monica Conway, Assistant Director of Catholic Education: Leadership said that the Framework is supporting schools in identifying strengths and areas requiring improvement to ensure better outcomes for all students and overall school performance.