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Dear Friends,

‘Good News’ for Young People in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains

Over the past few weeks you may have seen media coverage about how Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta (CEDP) is looking to further strengthen the Catholic faith of our young people through a review of the Religious Education Curriculum. With so many parents entrusting CEDP to teach their children the Catholic faith in our schools, the Diocese of Parramatta takes this responsibility extremely seriously. This letter is to update you on the current status of this exciting and evolving project.

Our Church teaches that parents and guardians are the first educators of their children. They have an obligation and right to educate their offspring (Canon 793 §1). I can assure everyone concerned that the Draft New Curriculum is firmly based in Catholic Scripture, Tradition and Context, focused on sharing the faith with students as well as encouraging them to become attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible Catholic adults.

The Religious Education Curriculum review process is not finalised. Right now, in Term 3 2020, we are trialling our first draft.

Following the trial, there will be opportunities for you to share your feedback for further refinement moving forward.

An up-to-date approach in the tradition of Catholic thought

As Catholic educators, we are working to better align with the sound educational principles behind effective student learning.

This new approach has been developed based on the big questions students themselves ask about life and their relationship with God. We understand their need to take an active role in finding the answers, in turn helping them to be more open to accepting and living our Church’s precious teachings at a deeper level.

Children always have lots of questions. You may be interested to know that the approach behind the new curriculum has been practised in Catholic education for centuries as illustrated in the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas developed more than 700 years ago. It consists of looking to our Catholic faith for answers to challenging questions arising from different scenarios. Pope Francis recently affirmed this method when he advised leaders in the Church not to simply continue answering “questions people are no longer asking.”

Working together as a Catholic community

The process of reviewing the Religious Education Curriculum began in 2014, by speaking to parents, clergy, teachers and students, through research conducted by Catholic educational experts at the University of Notre Dame. There have been 23 stages of review including consultation with teachers and students in 2016, learning frameworks developed by clergy and others in 2017, clergy and parent advisory groups in 2018 and trials and parental observations in 2019.



I enclose a full list of the steps we have undertaken so far, and those that are planned to come. Our intention is to have a transparent process. Numerous Church documents especially from the Congregation for Catholic Education underpin our approach which will be included in the final version of the Curriculum as a resource for teachers.

We look forward to the launch of the new Religious Education Curriculum and we continue to consult widely. The final version of the curriculum will be rolled out only when all stages of the process are complete.

Current Media Commentary

In recent days, we have seen one or two elements of the new curriculum discussed in the media. Unfortunately, some media outlets are not presenting the new curriculum accurately, particularly its teaching content.

Religious Education in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Parramatta will continue to give our young people a deeper understanding of *God, Jesus, Church, Prayer, Sacraments, Sacred Scripture and Christian Life*.

More information

We understand that many of you may have questions.

The Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta website contains podcasts and videos which discuss and demonstrate the rationale and the process we have followed. These can be found at <https://www.parra.catholic.edu.au/News-and-Events/Planning-for-the-Future/New-curriculum-to-connect-faith-learning-and-life>.

We also have a dedicated email address for your questions. Please send any questions you may have to feedback@parra.catholic.edu.au.

The process is evolving, and we are keen to hear from our Catholic community. We will keep you updated.

Like you, we want to share the gift of our Catholic faith with the young people of Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains.

Yours in Christ,

Very Rev Christopher de Souza

Vicar General

Episcopal Vicar for Education & Formation



Questions and Answers on the Draft Religious Education Curriculum for Catholic Education in the Diocese of Parramatta

We know some of you may have questions about the Draft New Religious Education Curriculum. Below are responses to some of the questions that have been asked. At the end of this document we explain how you can also find out more information.

What is happening?

Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta is updating the Religious Education Curriculum taught in schools in the Diocese of Parramatta. This process began with a review in 2014, and is continuing. We will be finalising the curriculum after we are satisfied we have consulted widely.

Has the Draft Curriculum been finalised?

No. The curriculum is still in draft mode. In Term 3 2020 a trial of the first draft of the curriculum is taking place. We will be monitoring the trial closely. We will continually review the curriculum. The next draft will be produced following the trial and further consultation.

Can amendments to the curriculum be made?

Yes. It is expected that the feedback received from our students, parents, clergy, parishioners, teachers and others will help shape the next stage.

Why is there commentary in the media and on social media about this curriculum?

The Draft New Curriculum is all about providing children and young people with a Catholic view from Scripture and Tradition about issues that they are wondering about.

Some commentators have suggested that the Draft New Curriculum is presenting a perspective on these issues that is not consistent with our Catholic teaching. This is inaccurate.

The curriculum is about giving our young people a way to talk about important questions in a way that is consistent with our shared faith.

What does a young person's sexuality or gender identity have to do with their faith? Has the Church's teaching changed on this?

Parents are children's first teachers (Canon 793 §1), particularly on these matters. At Catholic schools, the approach to these sensitive matters will be firmly based in the traditions and teachings of the Catholic Church.

A very small section of our new curriculum involves 15 and 16 year-old adolescents (Year 10 only) exploring the Catholic view on issues like sexuality and gender identity. This content will be age appropriate.

This learning is aimed at encouraging students to become attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible adults.

This supports the teachings of the Catholic Church. We are using methods of inquiry that date back 700 years to St Thomas Aquinas, which are still relevant today.

Is Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta changing the teachings of the Catholic Church with this new curriculum?

The new curriculum does not change the content of the Catholic Church's teachings.

The Magisterium of the Catholic Church (the way the Catholic Church interprets the Word of God) underpins the content of the Draft New Curriculum and follows the teachings of Pope Francis, the head of the Magisterium.

Further, this Draft New Curriculum is grounded in Canon 803 §2, "The instruction and education in a Catholic school must be grounded in the principles of Catholic doctrine; teachers are to be outstanding in correct doctrine and integrity of life."

The Draft New Curriculum is about updating the learning methods to help young people understand and embrace our Catholic Traditions and Faith.

Has any part of the curriculum been influenced by a particular point of view?

We have been rigorous in our consultation process ensuring we speak to people from many points of view.

At the same time, we have consciously founded our curriculum on the concepts of Catholic Social Teaching. We know parents send their children to Catholic schools to learn the Church's rich Tradition of social justice and to live out our faith in daily life.

Why are children learning about social media in religious studies?

Social media is a big part of the lives of young people. Our curriculum teaches children to seek the truth and inform their own conscience, and to think critically about what they are seeing and hearing on social media.

This learning is also aimed at encouraging students to become attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible adults.

I have a question – who can I ask about the new curriculum?

More information can be found at <https://www.parra.catholic.edu.au/Learning/Religious-Education>.

We have a dedicated email address feedback@parra.catholic.edu.au for questions.

TRANSFORMING LEARNING

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