A Learning and Teaching Strategy
for the Archdiocese of Melbourne
The Learning Centred School is one whose mission, organisation, leadership and curriculum delivery are all singularly focussed on providing successful learning experiences and outcomes for all its students.

(Dimmock, 2000)
LEARNING CENTRED SCHOOLS, A SACRED LANDSCAPE: LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY

2009-2013

RESPONDS TO THE VISION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

ARTICULATED IN ONE BODY – MANY PARTS: STRATEGY PLAN 2006–2010. IT IS AN INITIATIVE OF

THE CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE MELBOURNE TO SUPPORT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THEIR INDIVIDUAL

AND COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT EVERY STUDENT REACHES THE HIGHEST STANDARDS

AND ENJOYS THE BEST EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE. TO ACHIEVE THIS REQUIRES HIGH

EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND AN UNRELenting FOCUS ON HIGH

QUALITY LEARNING AND TEACHING IN EVERY SCHOOL.

THE STRATEGY STARTS FROM THE PREMISE THAT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING EXPERIENCES IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS ARE EFFECTIVE. IT THEN DESCRIBES THE CORE ELEMENTS NEEDED TO BUILD A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN THE ARCHDIOCESE SO WE CAN BECOME EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE OVER TIME.

THE LEARNING CENTRED SCHOOLS, A SACRED LANDSCAPE: LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY PROVIDES A COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE TO THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL. DRAWING ON A BROAD RANGE OF RESEARCH, THE STRATEGY DESCRIBES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENTS, IDENTIFIES EMERGING ISSUES AND PRIORITIES AND DETAILS ACTIONS TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS IN SUCCESSFULLY CRAFTING THEIR RESPONSE.


The contours of the Australian education landscape are ever shifting. As we have witnessed over the past decade, the educational and social contexts in which Catholic school communities engage have undergone significant changes. The rate and nature of change draws into focus the need for Catholic school communities to be active and responsive and equipped with the capacities to ensure successful learning for all students.

The Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals acknowledges these changes are placing new demands on Australian schools. It asserts that “improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is central to the nation’s social and economic prosperity and will position young people to live fulfilling, productive and responsible lives” (MCEETYA, 2008, page 7). For the next ten years these goals will shape the national educational context:

* **Goal 1:** Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
* **Goal 2:** All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, active and informed citizens.

Therefore in this context, the landscape for learning and teaching in Catholic schools must be characterised by:

**The Distinctive Nature of Learning and Teaching in a Catholic School**

The Catholic school is a sacred landscape where faith and knowledge are in dialogue. In this holy place, the formation of the religious and cultural identities of the learners is enacted. They become free and responsible, capable of living a spiritual life in dialogue with God, and capable of engaging with the Australian culture and society. They are empowered to shape and enrich this world with direction, meaning, purpose and hope derived from their encounter with the life and teachings of Jesus.

The learning and teaching process is a graced territory where the learner is seen as “autonomous (able to stand on their own feet), connected (with self, society, God and Church)" and with a transcendent orientation (with a spiritual identity – acting with integrity, from the best possible self). Personhood is at the heart of the learning and teaching process, as the person of each individual being, is at the heart of Christ’s teaching.

**Contemporary Learning for the Twenty-First Century**

We live in a world of fast and constant change, marked by rapid developments in science and technology, and where human activity and intervention are affecting our environment. Our society is characterised by global interdependency and population diversity and mobility, and we increasingly are confronted by complex social and environmental issues we cannot avoid. As communities become multicultural and multi-religious a greater understanding of, and respect for diverse ways of living is required. The rate of technological and social change requires new ways of learning that equip students to be lifelong learners and persons better adapted to the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

**Contemporary Catholic Curriculum and Pedagogy**

The curriculum in the Catholic school expresses the educative vision of the school community and an authentic understanding of Christ and his teaching. Within secular educational and social contexts the Catholic school seeks to bring into harmony faith, culture and life. The curriculum of the Catholic school is designed to demonstrate the value it holds for the dignity of the human person, a preferred culture of community and its commitment to social justice and service for the common good.

In a Catholic school, the student is at the centre of all curriculum arrangements and interactions within the learning community. The Catholic school offers a core curriculum, underpinned by high expectations of achievement, to which all students are entitled, realised through the transformative pedagogies of teachers. The curriculum in the Catholic school therefore combines Catholic values and a transformative view of learning and teaching. Experiences are designed to help students develop their knowledge, skills and understandings in all domains of learning.
Four strategic directions for learning and teaching direct the services provided by CEOM in support of the efforts of Catholic school communities to improve the educational experience and learning outcomes of all students. The CEOM is committed to ensuring this occurs through action in the areas of:

1. **Educational Leadership**
   
   **Our goal is to strengthen the capacities of leaders at all levels within a school community to enable them to successfully initiate and manage strategies for the continuous improvement of learning and teaching.**

   Research has shown that leadership is second only to teaching among the school-related factors that affect student learning. Effective leaders achieve this impact by setting the vision and direction of the school in pursuit of quality learning and teaching, developing teachers and others through the necessary training and support, and ensuring the school’s organisation facilitates rather than impedes learning and teaching. Strategic educational leadership that utilises evidence-based approaches and a focus on addressing variability of student performance between classes is a fundamental element of an effective school. Effective leadership and management are required at all levels within the school to ensure that high quality learning, teaching and curriculum are experienced by all students.

2. **Quality Teaching**
   
   **Our goal is to ensure all teachers have the required content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge for effective professional practice to improve student learning outcomes.**

   Over recent years Catholic schools have made significant gains in improving student learning outcomes and there is much to celebrate in all schools throughout the Archdiocese. Despite the gains, in both primary and secondary schools there are still cohorts of students who continue to have unacceptably low levels of performance, particularly in the key areas of literacy and numeracy which are the foundations of future success.

   Quality teaching is the key strategy by which this problem can be overcome. Research has clearly demonstrated that teaching is by far the most important source of variation in student achievement in schools. Teaching is a highly professional activity with a strong research base. Effective teachers require detailed subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge at a general level and what is known as pedagogical content knowledge about how to teach in their particular disciplines. They also continually strive to improve their capacity throughout their careers. Teachers should be supported to adopt contemporary, evidence-based teaching strategies that are demonstrably effective in meeting the learning needs of all the children for whom they are responsible.

3. **Continuous School Improvement and Accountability**
   
   **Our goal is to develop and sustain a culture of continuous improvement through systemic and school-based processes for monitoring, developing and reporting on learning and teaching outcomes.**

   The process of continuous improvement is predicated on the use of data to track progress and performance and intelligent accountability that involves the whole of the school community. With the implementation of the School Improvement Framework we have an effective mechanism for internal school accountability enabling leadership teams to develop and communicate a shared vision centred on the improvement of learning and teaching.

   Intelligent accountability uses multiple forms of evidence to analyse performance and develop appropriate improvement strategies based on the evidence of what works. The primary focus in this regard must be to improve instruction and provide teachers with the assessment data and feedback that enables them to design and implement teaching strategies matched to the specific needs of each and every learner in their class.

4. **Differentiated Support**
   
   **Our goal is to provide schools with targeted support to enhance their capacity to ensure improvement in student learning which can be sustained over time.**

   The diversity of school contexts and student backgrounds within the Archdiocese requires different approaches to improving student outcomes. Flexible service delivery is required which attends to the specific circumstances of a school and its community. In this context, support for schools can be targeted and differentiated according to identified needs, directed towards empowering and supporting school leadership teams and staff for continuous improvement.
Priority Areas

The four elements of this strategic direction are broad and to assist schools to navigate the direction and establish some pathways, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne has set some priorities for the period 2009-2013. The priorities encompass eight learning and teaching areas. The actions detailed in the priority areas are designed to support schools in their efforts to improve the educational experience and learning outcomes for all students.

1 Religious Education

During the period 2009 – 2013 CEOM will:
- continue initiatives to strengthen faith based leadership in schools, including sponsorship and accreditation and formation programs for leaders
- support the ongoing use of the To Know, Worship and Love texts through the implementation of the Religious Education Curriculum frameworks
- support the development of assessment and reporting according to the Religious Education standards.

2 Literacy

During the period 2009 – 2013 CEOM will:
- implement the actions described in Literacy in the Learning Centred School
- build upon initiatives to strengthen literacy leadership in schools, including accredited postgraduate study pathways for leaders
- implement the Literacy Assessment Project
- continue initiatives to strengthen the middle years of learning.

3 Mathematics

During the period 2009 – 2013 CEOM will:
- implement the actions described in Mathematics: Learning that Counts
- focus initiatives to strengthen teachers content pedagogical knowledge through targeted professional learning for teachers in each stage of schooling
- continue initiatives to strengthen Mathematics leadership in schools, including accredited postgraduate study pathways for leaders.

4 Contemporary Learning and Teaching

During the period 2009 – 2013 CEOM will:
- support the development of assessment and reporting according to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards
- publish online contemporary learning and teaching resources for teachers
- research and develop initiatives to support contemporary learning

5 Science

During the period 2009 – 2013 CEOM will:
- undertake a comprehensive review of science education in Catholic schools
- develop and implement a new science strategy with a focus on improving the quality of teaching and increasing student engagement in science.

6 Learning Spaces

During the period 2009 – 2013 CEOM will:
- develop an online resource bank that illustrates best practice school design with contemporary learning and teaching practice
- support all schools to undertake facility and infrastructure master planning to link educational vision with sustainable learning spaces.

7 Student Wellbeing

During the period 2009 – 2013 CEOM will:
- promote a safe and supportive school environment which celebrates inclusion and models values which are consistent with the Gospel teachings of Jesus
- establish and develop clusters as a key structural support to Student Wellbeing Coordinators in their role support schools in the implementation of a Social Emotional Learning strategy
- promote school community partnerships to support the wellbeing of the school community
- contribute to School Improvement through the promotion of an optimal learning environment to support engagement and learning outcomes

8 Targeted Populations

During the period 2009 – 2013 CEOM will:
- continue initiatives to support schools in improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students
- strengthen the capacity of schools to respond to the needs of new and recent arrivals and refugees
- continue initiatives to support schools in responding to the needs of educationally disadvantaged students and targeted populations with particular emphasis in the early years.
Changes associated with the development of a global, knowledge-based world, together with a growing understanding of how people learn have shifted the focus of education from merely gaining and replicating knowledge, to developing learners who can transfer and apply their knowledge within and beyond the classroom. Value is placed on the ability to innovate and create new knowledge. In a learning centred school, learning is differentiated, interactive and co-created. Schools are aware that an innovative approach is needed to respond to these challenges and they are grappling with the changes required to do things differently in order to do them better.

As a way of stimulating disciplined thinking around the innovation necessary to meet contemporary challenges, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne has developed a key strategy for each of the five innovation streams outlined in the Learning and Teaching Framework. Schools can analyse their context and begin their thinking around one or all of these innovation streams. The streams are interconnected and schools may focus on one or all as they embark on their innovation strategies.

**Innovation Stream**

**Leadership for Learning**
Strengthen the instructional leadership capacities of leaders at all levels within the school.

**Curriculum By Design**
Develop the pedagogic capacities of learning leaders to design and implement a rigorous and relevant curriculum for the 21st century.

**Transforming Pedagogy**
Develop the contemporary pedagogic capacities of teachers to ensure that students gain the knowledge, skills, values and understandings required to succeed in, and contribute to a modern, globalised world.

**Assessment for Teaching & Learning**
Develop the capacities of learning leaders and teachers to measure and monitor learning to improve progress of individuals and cohorts of students.

**Learning Environments**
Develop the capacities of learning leaders to promote contemporary school environments which are safe, flexible, inclusive and foster collaboration and creativity.