Information about Catholic schools

Who can enrol in a Catholic school?

Children from all families who are prepared to support Catholic ideals and principles may be considered eligible for enrolment in a Catholic school. Priority for enrolment is given in the following order:

- Children of Catholic families
  (* who are actively involved in the parish on which the school depend)
- Children of families residing in other parishes in which they are actively involved
- Children of families affiliated to Churches in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, such as the Maronite Church
- Children of Catholic families residing within the parish/parishes on which the school depends
- Children of Catholic families residing in other parishes
- Children of Orthodox or other Christian families
- Children of families of other religious convictions
- Children from non-Catholic backgrounds are accepted in most schools, but acceptance will depend on vacancies and local policies. If you are not Catholic and seek to enrol your child in a Catholic school, please call the Principal for further information.

** Catholic families are defined as families in which at least one parent is a Catholic or in which the children have been baptised Catholic.*

How do I enrol my child?

All Catholic systemic schools are responsible for their own enrolments. Contact the school principal or enrolment secretary for advice on the school's enrolment policy and procedure.

It is advisable to enrol your child as early as possible in the year before your child commences school.

To be eligible to enrol in Kindergarten children must:

- reach age 5 by 31st July in the year of commencement for NSW schools (with the exception of NSW schools in the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn)

- reach age 5 by 30 April in the year of commencement for ACT schools and NSW schools in the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn.

Parents are usually interviewed by the principal before the enrolment is finalised. Documents needed at the interview include birth certificate, baptismal certificate, immunisation records, and passport if you are newly arrived in Australia. Secondary schools may also require academic results or reports from the previous school, a reference from the parish priest or another prominent citizen, and medical records, if needed.

Most schools have an orientation day in Term 4 for children starting school the following year. Many schools also hold information nights for parents in Term 4 or in Term 1 of the year of commencement. For more information contact your local Catholic school.

How much are the school fees?

The sources of funds for Catholic systemic schools are government grants, school fees, and other private income such as subject levies, parish grants and fund-raising by Parents & Friends Associations.

Annual tuition fees for children attending Catholic systemic schools are set by a schools board. It is the policy of the board to keep fees to a minimum. Tuition fees are charged for the first three children in a family. Fees for the first child are charged at 100 per cent, for the second child at 75 per cent, and the third child at 50 per cent. The fourth child and subsequent children are exempt from tuition fees.

The tuition fee includes Student Accident Insurance cover for school activities only, i.e. during school hours, and other approved school activities such as school camps, school sport, work experience, and travelling to and from school.

Building Levies are charged at the local level to facilitate the maintenance and development of the school’s facilities. Discounts apply to building levies for families with children attending more than one systemic school.

In addition to fees and the Building Levy, various charges and levies are set at the local level. These may include charges for particular subjects, and for activities such as sport, excursions and retreats. School Principals, parish priests and organisations such as the Catholic Education Office, collaborate in an effort to keep these charges and levies to a minimum.

Catholic families who are unable to pay school fees and other charges are still very welcome to enrol in Catholic schools. Parish priests and Principals have the discretion to reduce or waive tuition fees, Building Levies and other charges and levies, in whole or part, for those families that can demonstrate that they are experiencing genuine financial difficulties.

How are quality and effectiveness assured in a Catholic school?

All Catholic schools are required to maintain processes in order to comply with the NSW Education Act 1990. In addition, schools regularly undergo a thorough Quality Assurance process known as School Review and Improvement (SRI). SRI, based on agreed criteria for quality Catholic schools, ensuring that school strategic management plans focus on improving learning outcomes for students.

How is discipline maintained in Catholic schools?

Catholic schools expect high standards of student behaviour and appearance. Each school has a Pastoral Care policy which includes programs to develop students' self-esteem and self-discipline, and to encourage students to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

In many schools, the students themselves are involved in developing discipline policies, and increasingly teachers, parents and students are working together to develop anti-bullying policies and programs. As well, many schools have access to counselling services, and run programs such as 'Seasons' to help students with grief and loss as a result of death, separation or divorce.

What is the curriculum in a Catholic school?

All Catholic primary and secondary schools fulfil the requirements of the NSW Education Act 1990 by following Board of Studies syllabuses endorsed by the Minister for Education and Training and the Executive Director of Schools in their diocese.

This means that teachers in Catholic schools follow the same curriculum as teachers in State and Independent schools. At the same time, Catholic schools integrate their Religious Education programs into the teaching of most subject areas.

In primary schools the curriculum is divided into six Key Learning Areas (KLAs):

English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Human Society and Its Environment, Creative Arts, and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education.

Secondary schools offer a broad choice of academic and vocational education subjects, including English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, Music, Art, Drama, Economics, Legal Studies, Design and Technology, Languages, Computing Studies, Business Studies, Hospitality and Retail Studies, and Studies of Religion. Most secondary schools also offer a range of extra-curricular activities including debating and public speaking, chess, Duke of Edinburgh Award, Mock Trial, and involvement in community action and social justice groups.

What part does Religious Education play in the curriculum?

Religious Education is at the heart of Catholic education. It informs and influences all learning in the school and is integrated throughout the primary and secondary curriculum.

Religious Education is provided in many ways. In the classroom, students follow the Religious Education Curriculum approved by the head of the church in their diocese.

Students also participate in reflection days and retreats, in the liturgical and prayer life of the school, and in community service activities and social justice programs.

What provisions are made for Special Education?

The first point of contact for enrolment of students with special needs into a Catholic school is the Principal of the school in which you wish to enrol. Where an enrolling student has special educational needs, the application will be referred to the Regional Consultant responsible for the particular school, who will assess whether or not the school can provide the facilities, resources and suitably trained personnel to support the educational needs of the applicant. Parents or caregivers will be involved in discussions with the Principal and Regional Consultant about the student's special needs, as part of the process of considering the application for enrolment.

Catholic Education Offices across the state offer various special support services to students with special needs, including:

- Services to students with hearing and vision impairment
- Special education services to assist schools integrating students with disabilities
- Transition planning support for students with disabilities.

A variety of programs is also offered in particular schools to cater for students of different abilities, including Gifted and Talented students, and students with other special needs including Reading Recovery and Early Literacy.

What about students from non-English speaking backgrounds?

Schools with a significant number of students learning English as a Second Language (ESL) will have teachers with training in ESL, and will provide programs appropriate to their students' needs as part of the school curriculum. Newly-arrived students needing extensive English who enrol at a Catholic secondary school have special provision made to attend the Catholic Intensive English Centre until their English reaches the level required by the school.

Catholic Education Offices may also operate itinerant teacher services to primary schools to support newly-arrived students (migrants and refugees) who need intensive ESL instruction.

Are parents encouraged to become involved?

Because the Church recognises that parents are the 'first and decisive' educators of their children, and that school and home are bound together in common purpose, parents are actively encouraged to become involved in their children's education in Catholic schools.

Parents are represented on their school's Finance Committee and the Enrolment Committee. These committees provide opportunities for parents to assist in the clarification of the school's mission, and the identification of priorities and outcomes for the school.

Each school community is expected to have a formal parent body such as a Parents & Friends Association or other relevant parent group. These bodies are advisory to the Principal. Parents are encouraged to be active in their local Association. They can also participate in and contribute to school life by helping with reading programs in the classroom, working in the school canteen, running the uniform shop, attending special days and events such as school liturgies and Book Week, helping teachers take students on excursions, and assisting at sporting events.