

DOBCEL STRATEGY 2035

Discussion Version

Confidential Draft 2 August 2024

This discussion version of DOBCEL Strategy 2035 is a result of an intensive process of co-design with wide stakeholder groups ranging from teachers, school leaders, students, and parents to those working in Catholic Education Ballarat offices. Insights, ideas and feedback that were collected during school visits, consultation meetings and leadership gatherings since October 2023 have been used to inform the shape, form and content of this strategy.

School visits, stakeholder meetings together with research, studies and reviews in Australia and in the rest of the world have guided design of this strategy. It is important to read this document as a strategy for the DOBCEL system of Catholic schools, not as an action plan for schools or an implementation plan with detailed procedures to develop the system.

The main purpose of this strategy is to inspire whole system to commit to and move towards *a high performing system of Catholic schools*. The key premise is that DOBCEL is a well-functioning system built on Catholic Identity and shared purpose and that it can be best transformed and improved by focusing on those systemic changes that are most likely to unleash human potential and unlock individual passion in schools, communities and the system.

DOBCEL – A system of Catholic Schools

Our vision is *as partners in Catholic education and open to God's presence, to pursue fullness of life for all.*

We will accomplish that vision by having *a high performing system of Catholic schools.*

“In educating a balance must be maintained, your steps must be well balanced, one step on the cornice of safety but the other into the zone of risk. And when the risk becomes safe, the next step must venture into another area of risk.

Education cannot be confined to the safety zone. No. This would mean preventing personalities from developing. Yet, it is not possible to educate solely in the risk zone either, this is too dangerous.

It is a balance of steps, remember it well. I also want to encourage you, educators, to seek new, unconventional forms of education, so as to comply with the needs of places, times and people.

Always go a step further and never be satisfied with conventional things. Seek new forms in accordance with the places, times and people. I encourage you to do this.” Pope Francis 2013

Preamble

The Catholic Church today is a vast and diverse institution facing significant challenges, actively engaging with global issues and working to adapt to a rapidly changing world. With over 1.3 billion members worldwide, the church retains strong influence in regions like Latin America, Africa, and the Philippines. However, it faces challenges from increasing secularisation and declining attendance, especially in Australia, Europe and North America.

Pope Francis, who emphasises themes like mercy, social justice, and environmental stewardship, has had significant impact on contemporary thinking and behaviour in his encyclicals, such as *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*. On the world stage, he has earned credibility through his promotion of peace, disarmament, and cooperation among nations.

Traditional church teachings on marriage, sexuality, and the sanctity of life often clash with secular trends, while church regulations at times confront more progressive members, particularly with regard to issues concerning the role of women in the church. An area of strength is advocacy for social justice in promoting the alleviation of poverty, cancellation of debt in small nations, healthcare, and education. The last is, of course, relevant to us in that we have inherited a long tradition of teaching, learning, and research.

On the other hand, scars from the scandal of clergy abuse remain despite authorities having implemented measures for greater transparency, accountability, and support for victims.

In addition, internal divisions between conservative and progressive factions regarding doctrine and reforms threaten the unity which should characterise members. Pope Francis' recent calling of a world-wide synod to determine the role of the church in the contemporary world has drawn support and criticism within and beyond church ranks.

Fundamental to the synod is the challenge for the Church as the People of God to walk forward together, listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, to participate in the mission of the Church in the communion that Christ establishes between us. It's a daily challenge directed to each one of us individually and to us all collectively.

High performing system of Catholic schools

The goal of this strategy is a **high performing system of Catholic schools** in the diocese of Ballarat by 2035.

A high performing system of Catholic schools is one where *the purpose of education is embedded in Catholic Identity and informed by the emerging futures of education.*

A high performing Catholic school system is one where *both students and staff are strongly engaged in learning and teaching and where they have a positive sense of belonging in their school and community.*

A high performing Catholic school system is one where *students and staff feel safe, valued, and respected, and where their wellbeing and health are enhanced as foundations of productive learning and teaching.*

A high performing Catholic school system is one where *the quality of student learning outcomes across the curriculum exceeds expectations.*

A high performing Catholic school system is one where *student outcomes across different equity groups have similar distributions and averages and where all students have equal access to excellent learning and wellbeing opportunities.*

A high performing Catholic school system is one where *all human resources, financial resources, time and natural resources invested in education benefit students, schools, community and society in optimal ways.*

1. DOBCEL Strategy 2035: Theory of Change

As a Catholic school system, the Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Ltd (DOBCEL) is a strong, well-performing system in most of the abovementioned dimensions of education system performance. However, it can do better as measured in all these dimensions.

DOBCEL Strategy 2035 is set in a rapidly changing, uncertain world where even short-term organisational targets are difficult to define.

Therefore, this 10-year strategy provides general directions and strategic priorities for the DOBCEL school system.

As always, the implementation of this strategy is the ultimate judge of the directions and priorities presented next. Co-design is the leading principle in moving the ideas that follow into action and permanent practice.

Guided by our vision, we will move towards the commonly agreed goal through three practical principles:

Deeper collaboration: Systematic efforts to enable deeper cooperation in and between schools combined with building social capital across the DOBCEL system.

Networked ground-up innovation: Purposeful investments initiating local innovation and renewal of learning and teaching through co-designed school improvement.

Collective autonomy and agency: Schools understand that they are trusted to make the best decisions for those in their care and understand their mutual obligation to the Governing Authority and the responsibilities that they carry. Schools are more connected to one another, and that student voice, agency and active engagement in school is prioritised.

2. Change forces shaping our future

The rapidly changing, uncertain world is a condition of the dynamic and intersecting change forces being experienced globally. Change forces both directly and indirectly influence education and need to be understood and reflected in this strategic document.

Global change forces are large-scale, sustained, and transformative trends that shape the future by having profound impacts across various areas, including individuals, societies, economies, and the environment.

These change forces are interconnected, influencing several sectors and regions, often driving profound changes over time. They have the potential to impact education both directly and indirectly and shape schooling experiences in the future.

Therefore, they call on our attention and require our consideration. The following four features describe global change forces.

Pervasiveness: They affect numerous countries, regions, and communities, transcending national boundaries and impacting global systems.

Example: Global health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Longevity: They unfold over long time horizons, typically decades, and have enduring effects on the world and lives of most individuals.

Example: Climate change

Transformative Impact: They bring about significant shifts in societal norms, economic structures, technological advancements, and environmental conditions.

Example: Mobile technologies

Interconnectedness: They are often interconnected with other change forces and issues, creating complex, multifaceted challenges and opportunities.

Example: Artificial intelligence

Global change forces impacting schools by 2035

Global change forces that are currently shaping the ways we live cause risks in our lives, but they also offer opportunities for renewal. The following five

global change forces are commonly seen as fundamental megatrends affecting how we think about education now and for the future. They are offered here as inspirations to rethink and adjust DOBCEL's strategy for the next decade.

Climate change

"As stewards of God's creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that noble calling." – Pope Francis

The long-term change in weather and climate globally that has been accelerated by human behaviours is resulting in potentially irreversible environmental changes. The human induced warming of the atmosphere resulting in the degradation of the environment is having an influence on people's lives globally.

Socially, climate change exacerbates health issues, increases poverty, and heightens social inequalities. The capacity of climate change to disrupt ecosystems and impact natural resources, along with the potential of populations being displaced, makes this a force requiring attention.

Climate change is connected and consequential to many other change forces, making it a complex and critical issue. This situation requires a deep understanding of the drivers and conditions that lead to climate change. It also requires schools to support and enable behaviours and actions that proactively deal with the issue.

Although this is a global phenomenon, the most pressing responses are required at national and local levels.

"Find out what better ways there are to make stuff that doesn't turn into rubbish".- Stephen, Grade 1 student.

Growing inequalities

"Real success can only come if there is a change in our societies and in our economics and in our politics." - Sir David Attenborough

Inequality has extensive and far-reaching impacts on economies, societies, and political systems. Economic disparities affect access to resources and opportunities, leading to social instability.

Inequality has the potential to erode trust, undermine institutions and perpetuate separation. It also impacts health and education, limiting social mobility and economic stability.

Inequality affects access to quality healthcare and education, which in turn impacts people's life prospects and well-being. Poorer populations often have worse health outcomes and lower educational attainment, perpetuating a cycle of eroding wellbeing and a widening social divide.

Understanding and addressing inequalities is a step toward enabling social justice and healthy communities and, therefore, should be of primary importance to schools and education systems.

Acting to address existing inequities within our realm of influence should be a priority, as inattention to this force will have prolonged and sustained flow-on effects.

"What happens to all the leftover food and clothes in shops? Could we give that to people in need?" – Evie, Grade 3 student

Demographic shifts

"Above all I ask leaders and legislators and the entire international community above all to confront the reality of those who have been displaced by force, with effective projects and new approaches in order to protect their dignity, to improve the quality of their life and to face the challenges that are emerging from modern forms of persecution, oppression and slavery." – Pope Francis

Demographic shifts are shaping the make-up of communities and impacting the distribution of populations and character of the world's regions. These demographic changes directly influence economic growth, communities, education, and health, among other elements of the social fabric, calling on us to consider our current policies, their applicability, and their contextual relevance.

Changing demographic elements such as age, ethnicity, and family size invite us to critically assess existing approaches as to the capacity to enable integration and social cohesion.

Changing migration patterns, increasing diversity and changes in demographic norms have the potential to enrich societies if communities pay attention to

embedding culturally appropriate policy and activating meaningful dialogue and relationships.

Given these extensive impacts, demographic shift is a defining change force that shapes the future globally, necessitating comprehensive and forward-looking strategies. Strategies that are shaped with young people, alongside caring adults and in collaboration with local communities.

"I think that we shouldn't think differently of anyone, and we should treat each other the same." – Secondary student.

Technological advancement

"Artificial intelligence ought to serve our best human potential and our highest aspirations, not compete with them." - Pope Francis.

Digital technologies will have transformative and far-reaching impacts on economies, societies, and daily life.

The advancement of traditional technologies and the evolution of emergent capabilities such as artificial intelligence (AI) is going to have a revolutionary impact on education, society, and our lives at large.

These technologies reshape social interactions and lifestyles, changing how people communicate, access information, and learn. They support global connectivity, enabling real-time collaboration across borders. The rapid pace of innovation in digital technologies and AI accelerates technological progress, leading to continuous advancements and new opportunities for human empowerment.

However, they also raise important ethical and regulatory challenges, including data privacy, security, and the impact of automation on employment.

This dichotomy calls on schools to navigate this complexity, find ways to embrace technology, and use it to supplement and enhance the educational experience.

Educating future generations about the power and perils of technology will be paramount to realising healthy communities and deep learning.

"Technology is significant in this day and age and it teaches you and helps you in day to day life". – Secondary student

The nature of work, learning and living

"We fear the future because we are wasting today." - Mother Teresa

Global change forces reshape societies, economies, individual lifestyles, work, and education. The redefining of employment, reflected in role descriptions, skill requirements, and flexible and remote work options, is influencing social mobility and employment aspirations.

This transformation necessitates continuous learning and adaptation, impacting educational systems from early childhood to adult education.

These shifts in working, learning and living influence public policies, social trends, and economic developments, challenging governing bodies to adapt policies on labour conditions, education, and digital infrastructure to support inclusive growth and innovation.

Addressing these changes requires agile responses and lifelong learning strategies to harness opportunities and mitigate challenges posed by this dynamic global trend.

Schools could benefit from thinking deeply about the balance between work, learning and living and exploring the increasingly porous boundaries between these once disparate things.

"I'd like to be a person who makes up new ideas for what people can invent". – Secondary student

The state of school education: Five global and local trends

The available data collected over the past 20 years, reflected through indicators and studies, provides an assessment and trends of education systems globally and in Australia. The following five points provide an overview of key data as it relates locally and globally.

1. Stagnating or declining student learning outcomes

Student learning outcomes in school are concise statements often included in formal curriculum that describe what students are expected to know, be able to do, or value because of completing a learning experience, such as a course, project, or educational programme.

Global

Student learning outcomes in reading literacy, mathematics and science have been systematically measured using international large-scale student assessments since the

1960s. Year 2000 marked the beginning of a new era in these assessments when the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) launched its triennial survey that provides comparable data on student learning outcomes in reading, mathematical and scientific literacies in all 39 OECD countries. Based on data from these surveys over one and half decades, there has been virtually no improvement in the learning outcomes of students in the Western World.

Australia

Australia has taken part in OECD's international student assessments since year 2000. Student learning outcomes in reading, mathematical and scientific literacies in these surveys have been in steady decline over the past two decades. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy is an annual assessment instrument employed in all Australian schools in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 since 2008. It shows, in general, no improvement in students' learning outcomes.

2. Widening educational inequities

***Educational equity** refers to ensuring that every student has access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to achieve academic success, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances. It also requires that students in different equity groups have similar learning outcomes and that school completion rates across these equity groups are similar. The purpose of educational equity is to provide fair and inclusive learning environments for all students.*

Global

There is no one single index that is used to measure educational equity, but it is done using various indicators. Available global data show that 15-year-old students' academic achievement gap in OECD countries between the highest and the lowest socioeconomic (SES) quartiles is equal to three years of schooling. These gaps have remained unchanged for two decades and more recently increased due to the global pandemic. High school graduation rates in the OECD region are about 80 percent, with a larger concentration of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth among those who don't successfully complete upper secondary education.

Australia

In international comparisons, Australian school education is regarded as inequitable with several system-wide inequalities. These inequalities manifest in socio-economic, geographic, and racial disparities affecting learning and wellbeing outcomes of students from low-income families, rural and remote areas, and Indigenous communities. These students often experience limited access to educational resources, qualified teachers, and technology, leading to lower educational performances compared to their peers in urban or privileged schools. While inclusive education policies are common, support for students with special educational needs and disabilities is inconsistent.

3. Student sense of belonging and engagement in school are dropping

Student sense of belonging in school is about students' perceptions of being accepted, valued and included in their school setting by their peers and adults and is influenced by a complex set of relationships with peers, teachers, families and the broader community.

Student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when in school, which extends to the level of motivation they display and progress in their education.

Global

Although most students in the OECD countries report that they feel socially connected at school, overall, students' sense of belonging has declined during the past two decades. Across the OECD countries, on average, this decline has been 7 percentage points over that period. Students in schools with higher concentration of socio-economic disadvantages and those attending rural schools are more likely to have a weaker sense of belonging at school than their peers in other schools. Student engagement in their school also tends to decline over time, and they become less engaged as they make their way through the school system.

Australia

Student sense of belonging and engagement in their school in Australia follow the global trends described above. Australian 15-year-old students' sense of belonging has dropped 18 percentage points since 2003 compared to an average 7 percentage point decline in OECD countries. Survey data also suggest that the longer Australian students stay in school, the less engaged in and enthusiastic about school they become. There is also evidence indicating that disengagement in education has increased over time, which can be seen in declining rates of school attendance.

4. Student and teacher wellbeing are in jeopardy

Student wellbeing means the holistic state of a student's physical, mental, emotional, and social health. Feeling safe, liked and supported in school, maintaining positive relationships with other people in school, having a healthy sense of belonging, and experiencing personal growth are common elements of wellbeing. Student wellbeing is also associated with being able to manage stress and emotional challenges and engage in healthy lifestyle practices in and out of school. Wellbeing is an important condition for deeper learning, personal development, and happiness. **Teacher wellbeing** is the holistic state of a teacher's physical, mental, and emotional health, which directly influences their job satisfaction, performance in school, and overall quality of life.

Global

Around the world, more young people than before experience increased anxiety, stress, and depression due to academic performance expectations, social media influences, growing insecurity, and uncertain futures. A range of mental health issues, including depression and anxiety disorders, have become more prevalent among students and have been exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted traditional relationships and social safety networks. Although schools are increasingly addressing these student wellbeing challenges by implementing new programs, promoting mental health awareness, and creating supportive services in schools, disparities exist, especially among students living with socio-educational disadvantages and attending poorly resourced schools. An increasing number of teachers are experiencing wellbeing challenges in their schools, too. Evidence shows that teacher wellbeing is directly associated with the wellbeing and academic success of their students. Therefore, teacher wellbeing is an important factor in schools improving wellbeing across the school community.

Australia

In recent years, also in Australia, children's mental health and wellbeing have been in decline. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, among younger children (aged 4–11), 72% had mild mental disorders, 20% had moderate disorders, and 8 % had severe disorders. Severe disorders were more common among boys than girls. In 2023, mental health conditions, substance use disorders and injuries contributed the most burden for young people aged 15–24. The leading causes of total burden varied between males and females. Suicide and self-inflicted injuries were the leading specific cause of total burden among males, and anxiety disorders were the leading specific cause among females. Several reviews since the COVID-19 pandemic have found substantial deterioration of children's mental health, particularly during periods of lockdown and for children with pre-existing conditions and families in financial distress. Consequently, student and staff wellbeing in schools has become a prevalent issue of concern in most Australian schools.

5. Eroding economic efficiencies in education

Economic efficiency in education indicates how optimally resources are used to achieve the best possible educational outcomes. It focuses on how well investments in education, such as funding, time, and human resources, benefit students, schools, and society. Economic efficiency compares the education system's performance to expected outcomes, helping to reduce waste and inefficiencies and ensure that educational outcomes justify the investments. Economic efficiency in education aims to create an education system where resources are allocated effectively to produce the best educational and economic returns.

Global

Around the world, real spending on education has grown steadily over the last one and half decades, although government education spending as a share of GDP has remained flat during that time. Not only has total spending on education increased, but also per student cost is now more expensive than before. Global data show that these average increases in per-capita education spending increased education outcomes by a relatively small amount: for every 10 percent increase in per-student spending, outcomes improved by only 0.8 percent. Finally, it is noteworthy that public spending on education is highly unequal, with wealthier families benefiting from more of the available resources compared to their more disadvantaged peers.

Australia

Total spending on school education in Australia has been steadily increasing. In Australia, public expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP on primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education from final source of funds is 3.7%, which is comparatively high internationally. Total expenditure that includes funding from private sources is 4.3% of GDP is internationally high, meaning that 20% of all money that goes to schools comes from private sources, mostly from households. Economic efficiency of Australian school education is moderate, given the high cost and intensive resources that are spent to produce current levels of quality and equity of education.

How do DOBCEL schools perform today?

DOBCEL schools perform well in most of the dimensions of the high-performing education system mentioned earlier. Results in National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) DOBCEL schools typically follow the Australian trend. Attraction of staff, accommodation/housing, public transport, and access to health and essential services entrenches regional disadvantage. We continue to grapple with the best ways to support students with diverse learning needs. In student engagement, DOBCEL data mirrors again the Australian trend. Student and teacher wellbeing is a significant and growing concern for DOBCEL. Finally, DOBCEL staffing has increased considerably in schools, with the highest growth in staff other than qualified teachers.