

13 August 2025

Media release

1,400 Catholic educators and leaders to gather in Cairns for national conference with a focus faith, excellence and access

From 20 – 22 August, 1,400 delegates including educators and leaders, clergy and religious, parents, academics, chairs and board members, will gather in Cairns for the 2025 Australian Catholic Education Conference (2025ACEC).

National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) Executive Director Jacinta Collins said the conference is the largest gathering of Catholic educators in Australia.

“We are delighted to be partnering with Catholic Education Cairns for our triennial conference this year, especially after such a strong turnout and engagement in Melbourne in 2022,” Ms Collins said.

“This year’s theme, ‘hope, anchored in faith’, reflects our deep commitment to the mission and strategic vision of Catholic education, grounded in our three strategic priorities: Faith, Excellence and Access”.

The [three-day program](#) will feature more than 70 keynote addresses, panel discussions, workshops and masterclasses. Key themes include Catholic identity, mission and formation; learning and teaching; leadership and governance; parent, parish and community engagement; resourcing and infrastructure; advocacy and marketing; and more.

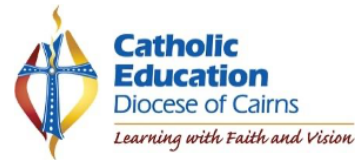
The conference will open with an address from NCEC Chair Nicholas Moore AO, focusing on the theme ‘hope, anchored in faith’. He will be joined in welcoming delegates by Queensland Assistant Minister for Tourism, Early Learning, Creative Industries and Far North Queensland, and Member for Barron River, Bree James MP.

On Thursday, Federal Education Minister Jason Clare will join Archbishop of Sydney Anthony Fisher OP for an *In Conversation* discussion.

“We are pleased to welcome Minister Clare and Archbishop Fisher for an engaging discussion on the contribution of Catholic education in Australia including our involvement in contributing to the national reform agenda,” Ms Collins said.

Keynote speakers include:

- Sr Nathalie Becquart, the first woman appointed to the role of General Undersecretary for the Synod of Bishops, and a global leader in synodality and youth ministry, who will deliver the opening keynote.
- Professor Dylan Wiliam, Emeritus Professor of Educational Assessment at the UCL Institute of Education, who will present on equitable educational improvement, lead masterclasses on school accountability and teacher development, and deliver a full-day workshop on *Assessment of, for, and as Learning*.



- Dr Steve Constantino, Executive Professor at William & Mary's School of Education and a nationally recognised expert in family engagement, who will lead a keynote and two masterclasses on family engagement.
- Dr Simon Breakspear, founder of Strategic Schools, who will deliver the Closing Keynote and lead sessions on strategic subtraction and the Teaching Sprints approach.
- Dr Jordana Hunter, Education Program Director at Grattan Institute, who will present an Ed Talk on the power of quality-assured curriculum materials to lift learning, reduce workload, and build teacher expertise and offer a workshop on the Maths Guarantee.

Former ABC journalist Philippa McDonald will be the Master of Ceremonies over the three days.

Catholic Diocese of Cairns Bishop Joe Caddy AM said he was confident delegates would be uplifted by the impressive line-up of speakers.

"I really commend it to all attending and hope that they feel renewed and encouraged in their mission within our Catholic schools," he said.

Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns Executive Director Durm O'Riordan said this is the first time the conference will be held in a regional area and the diocese is proud to co-host the event and welcome participants from across the country, New Zealand, Oceania, Canada and the United States.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the unique character and contribution of Catholic education in Far North Queensland," Mr O'Riordan said.

"I'm particularly pleased that our students will have the opportunity to participate and engage in the conference through a student panel with Bishop Joe Caddy AM and participation in a formation session and large-scale Mass in the Arena which will include a 400 student choir, 1,400 delegates and over 800 students attending from schools across Far North Queensland, including Waiben and Weipa," he said.

Catholic school students from across Australia have also contributed over 100 artworks for display at the conference and sent video messages for a special Speaking to Country video at the opening plenary, which will also feature a dance by students from the Torres Strait and Welcome to Country by Traditional Owners from the Yidinji Nation.

For those unable to attend in person, an [on-demand ticket](#) is available giving access to keynote sessions and professional learning content for three months after the conference.

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Background

About Catholic Education in Australia

- Across Australia, there are 1,751 Catholic schools educating one in five or 820,000 students and employing 112,000 staff
- Catholic Education is the largest provider of schooling in Australia outside of government
- More than 40% of Catholic schools are located in regional, rural and remote areas
- 42% of our students come from low socio-educational backgrounds
- 23% of students supported with disability
- 161% growth in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment over 10 years
- Catholic education contributes more than \$17 billion annually to Australia's economy
- Families contribute over \$6 billion annually in fees and capital levies that reduce the burden on government
- School communities have built educational infrastructure worth an estimated \$100 billion for the nation
- Research shows those who attend Catholic schools are more likely, on average, to see lifelong benefits in employment, health and life satisfaction
- In addition, Catholic school attendees are more likely to work in an industry or sector that directly benefits the public and are more likely to donate to charity

About Catholic Education in Cairns

- Most Rev Joe Caddy AM is the Bishop of Cairns
- Spanning 377,000km², Catholic Education in the Diocese of Cairns is made up of 30 school communities educating 12,000 students and employing 1,800 staff
- The diocese extends from Tully in the south, west to the Atherton Tablelands, and north to the Torres Strait
- About one in four school students in the Far North attends a Catholic school
- Students do not need to be Catholic or come from Catholic families or backgrounds – enrolments are welcome from families that are supportive of the values associated with Catholic schools.
- Catholic schools consistently perform well in NAPLAN, QCE and ATAR results for Year 12, with strong VET pathways, enhanced through the colleges' Trade Training Centres
- All schools have a strong family focus and dedicated parent involvement through P&Fs and volunteer programs
- Catholic education is one of the largest non-government employers in the region