



**Catholic  
Education**  
Diocese of Cairns

*Learning with Faith and Vision*

# Annual Report



# 2025



**Catholic  
Education**  
Diocese of Cairns

*Learning with Faith and Vision*



# World-Class Education

for every culture, ability, religion and budget.

- ✓ 30 schools and colleges in Far North Queensland
- ✓ Welcoming and inclusive environments
- ✓ No catchment areas
- ✓ Compassionate fee concessions

## Contents

|                                           |    |
|-------------------------------------------|----|
| From the Bishop of Cairns .....           | 5  |
| The Year in Review .....                  | 6  |
| Board of Governance.....                  | 10 |
| About Us.....                             | 11 |
| Governance .....                          | 12 |
| CEDC Strategic Directions 2021–2025 ..... | 14 |
| Encounter Catholic Identity .....         | 20 |
| First Nations .....                       | 22 |
| Engagement, Wellbeing & Learning .....    | 24 |
| Workforce Capability .....                | 26 |
| Finance .....                             | 28 |





# SNAPSHOT OF AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC EDUCATION



There are **1,750** Catholic Schools in Australia

**805,000** students attend Catholic schools in Australia



**115,000** staff are employed in Catholic education



**38%** are regional & remote schools



Students with disability make up **24%** of the student population in Catholic schools



In the past decade, the number of First Nations students in Catholic schools has increased by **60%**

**56%** of students are Catholic



**43%** lowest two SEA quartiles



# From the Bishop of Cairns

As I reflect on my first two years as Bishop of Cairns, I continue to be struck by the same truth I felt from my very first visits to our schools: our young people are not just the future of the Church, they are very much its present. In our classrooms, playgrounds, liturgies and communities, they remind us daily that Catholic education is one of the most vital ways the Church lives, serves and shares faith.

It has been a rich two years. In 2025, I had the privilege of welcoming Catholic educators from across Australia and overseas to Cairns for the Australian Catholic Education Conference — the first time this national gathering had ever been held outside a major metropolitan city. More than 1,400 educators attended in addition to our own students, who included a 400-voice choir at the conference Mass. In one of the conference sessions, I interviewed on stage six of our secondary students who spoke candidly to me and to conference participants about what makes a real difference in their education.

I have also enjoyed getting out into our schools more directly: from visiting Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Waiben where students and staff welcomed us with traditional dance and song; to the magnificent NAIDOC Week celebrations at Mount St Bernard College, Herberton. In these varied settings, I have seen firsthand the depth of learning, care and cultural pride our schools foster every day.



Blessing of the CEDC Mulgrave Road Office



**Most Rev. Joseph Caddy AM, Bishop of Cairns**

These experiences have reminded me of the dedication it takes to deliver great Catholic education across our Diocese. Since my arrival, I have come to appreciate that our schools remain one of the most powerful places where the Church meets families — where students encounter Christ through the kindness of a teacher, the welcome of a classmate, and the witness of staff who live their faith daily. Enrolments across the diocese have stayed strong, and the trust families place in us to educate their children academically, spiritually and morally is a privilege we value deeply.

To the leadership, principals, teachers and staff of Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns (CEDC): thank you for the work you do, much of it unseen, that shapes generations. To our students and families: thank you for walking this journey with us and for the life, faith and hope you bring to our schools. I look forward to what the next years will bring, confident that Catholic schools will continue to be places where young people are already shaping the life of the Church.

# The Year in Review

## From our Executive Director Diarmuid O’Riordan

2025 was a year of great significance to Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns (CEDC). It was my honour to rejoin the organisation (after nearly a decade in the south) as Executive Director.

Many things changed in my time away from the Far North, but one thing that has clearly remained as strong as ever was the dedication of the more than 2,000 professionals who join us in the shared mission of Catholic education in our beautiful part of the world.

A particular highlight of the year for CEDC was the staging of the 2025 Australian Catholic Education Conference – the first time this event has ever been held outside a capital city. It was a wonderful experience for all who attended and showcased our work in the Diocese of Cairns to educators from around Australia and overseas.

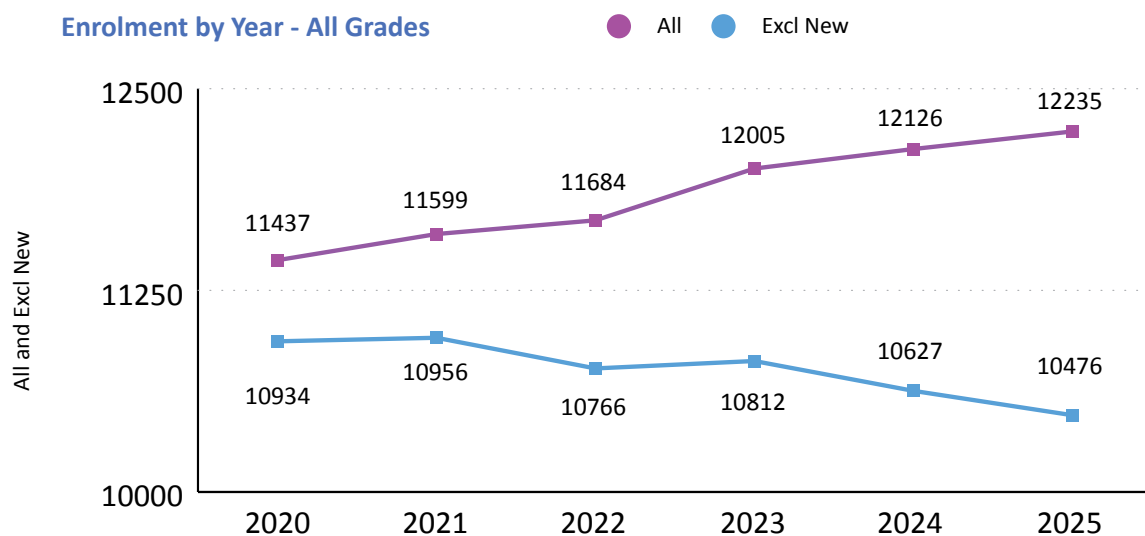
Along with the success of the conference, other highlights included great progress made with our strategic goals and continuing enrolment growth.



## Enrolments

Our student enrolments continued to increase in 2025, though the rate of growth has slowed. Overall numbers across our 30 schools and colleges increased to 12,235 – up from 12,126 in 2024. Overall increases in recent years have slowed as our two newest schools – MacKillop Catholic College and Newman Catholic College –

approach their planned student cohort size. Over the past five years, our student numbers have increased by around 6%, but – based on population data for our region – we anticipate that future growth will average around 0.5% per year over the next five years.



Nb. Excl new = All schools excluding MacKillop and Newman





Student group forum at ACEC 2025



ACEC 2025 Mass

## Australian Catholic Education Conference

CEDC hosted the 2025 Australian Catholic Education Conference (ACEC), welcoming more than 1,400 delegates from around the nation – and beyond – with our beautiful ‘winter’ weather. Over three days in August, following the theme of ‘hope, anchored in faith’, a wide range of topics was discussed in more than 70 sessions, with overwhelmingly positive feedback provided by the delegates.

A program of world-class speakers discussed areas of professional interest, including a thought-provoking opening keynote address by Sr Nathalie Becquart xmcj, Undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops – the first woman to hold such a position in the Vatican and the first to have voting rights in the Synod. She probed the meaning of synodality and how this impacts our daily work. Other keynote addresses were provided by Professor

Dylan Wiliam, Dr Steve Constantino, and Dr Simon Breakspear. Federal Education Minister, the Hon. Jason Clare MP, and the Archbishop of Sydney, the Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP, discussed ‘big picture’ curriculum and funding priorities which reflect the environment in which we work.

Of particular note was the inclusion of our CEDC students in some sessions, culminating in an interesting panel discussion – ‘Voices that matter, actions that count’ – featuring students from six of our colleges, moderated by Bishop Joe Caddy AM, on the final day of the conference.

The undoubted highlight for many was the Mass held on the opening day – filling the arena of the Cairns Convention Centre with prayer and song. More than 1,000 students from CEDC schools participated in the Mass and made a striking impression on the delegates.

## Student Outcomes

In recent years, CEDC has implemented a strategy aimed at better supporting student engagement, refining our pedagogy and improving student outcomes. This work has been reflected in some outstanding outcomes in 2025.

The proportion of our graduating seniors being awarded either a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) or a Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) was above the state benchmark at 97.82%.

The majority of our Year 12 students also leave school with one or more Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications. In 2025, 58.89% of our Senior students achieved a successful VET outcome – Certificate I, II, III or IV, or a Diploma or Advanced Diploma.

In all, 99.23% of senior students left school with a recognised outcome of some type – an outstanding result.



Ian Davis with 2025 Docemus Award winner Dr Andrea O'Brien

## Catholic Education Week

Catholic Education Week was celebrated from 27 July to 2 August, emphasising the Church's Jubilee year theme, Pilgrims of Hope, while reminding us that our schools are Communities of Faith, Hope and Love.

As usual, we celebrated the work of not just our students, but also our staff; the latter through the Docemus ("To teach") Awards and Spirit of Catholic Education Awards.

Congratulations to Deputy Executive Director, Ian Davis, on being selected as the recipient of the 2025 Spirit of Catholic Education Award – a fitting recognition of his more than 40 years service to Catholic schools and students throughout Queensland.

Congratulations also to the winners of the Docemus Awards for 2025:

Primary Teacher: **Andrea Devaney**

Secondary Teacher: **Clare Robertson**

Early Career Teacher: **Gabrielle McArthur**

School Officer: **Narelle Mears**

Volunteer: **Hannah Santarossa**

Leadership: **Dr Andrea O'Brien**

Lifelong Contribution: **Margaret See Kee**



The 2025 Docemus Award Recipients



## First Nations Education

Our First Nations Education Strategy was rolled out and will continue to guide our efforts to narrow the gap in educational outcomes between First Nations students and others.

This emphasis proved successful in 2025, with our proportion of First Nations students being awarded a QCE/QCIA significantly above the statewide figure. And over the last five years, our number of First Nations students in this category has leapt from 68.85% in 2021 to 94.74% in 2025 – evidence that our approach is achieving strong results for these young men and women.

In the primary sphere, students from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Waiben, joined with their peers from two Catholic schools in Brisbane in the City to Country STEM project, an innovation in which the southern students travelled to Waiben, allowing all of the participants to learn together and better understand each other.

During 2025, we further developed our Nulung-Kayn Kasi leadership program, with more than 50 First Nations student leaders installed over the course of the year.

## Artificial Intelligence

The scope of Artificial Intelligence – especially Generative AI – continued to leap ahead across society this year. This can serve as both a tool and a concern in our schools. The key is to manage it effectively and use it to achieve the best educational outcomes, whilst teaching students to use it appropriately. This year, we circulated a Generative AI Position Statement to guide both students and teachers in its use.

We also undertook an organisation-wide trial of Microsoft Copilot, which we have adopted as our closed, CEDC-only Generative AI system. This ensures that information and data within our system cannot be accessed by broader users of the Copilot platform outside of CEDC.

We provided guides for both students and staff to refer to in their use of Generative AI. Of those staff taking part in the trial, 72% reported a significant reduction in their workload when making use of Copilot. CEDC will continue to monitor the use of Generative AI to ensure that it is used only to enhance learning, based on input from recognised, accurate sources.

## Strategic Directions

2025 was the final year of implementation of our Strategic Directions 2021–2025 plan. A detailed summary of the strategy and associated achievements is published in this report. The strategy guided us in multiple pathways and we achieved (or at least substantially achieved) the goals which we set for ourselves.

With the current plan nearing finalisation, we then worked to develop the next iteration – a strategic plan to guide the organisation over the next three years, assisting us to bring to life our Vision to offer every student in every school a world-class education, enriched by their lived encounter with the Catholic faith. CEDC again commits to being “Christ-centred, student-focussed and future ready”.

## Project Compass

In the second half of the year, we undertook an organisational review of the structure of our office and support functions (Catholic Education Services). This included broad consultation with schools and CES staff, to ensure that our structure best supported our schools and would deliver the outcomes sought from our new Strategic Directions plan. The new structure included the broadening of our Executive and Leadership teams, to take effect at the beginning of 2026.

At year’s end, we farewelled our Deputy Executive Director, Ian Davis, and the Assistant Executive Director, Dr Andrea O’Brien, who both retired after more than 80 years collective dedication to Catholic education. They go with our sincere gratitude and best wishes for the future.

12,235

### Total Enrolment

(Up from 11,621 in 2021, largely due to our new schools)

97%

### Year 12 QCE/QCIA Attainment

(Up from 89% in 2021)

89%

### Attendance Rate

(Down from 91% in 2021)

66%

### Staff (teaching & non-teaching) in Faith Formation

(No data from 2021)

# Board of Governance

The Board is comprised of experienced professionals with a wide range of skills, knowledge and ability. We share a common goal for the betterment of educational outcomes for the students of the Diocese through the provision of world-class education.

Membership of our Board underwent some renewal in 2025. We farewelled Fr Kerry Crowley and Professor Maree Dinan-Thompson at the beginning of the year. Ex-officio members, Andrea O'Brien and Ian Davis, stood down at year's end as they moved into retirement. We thank them for their service to the Board and to Catholic education over many decades. We warmly welcomed to the Board the new Vicar for Education, Fr Sabu Kalapurackal, Andrew Cornes and Bob Epps.

Our new Executive Director, Diarmuid O'Riordan, joined us at the beginning of the year as an ex-officio member. The Board has enjoyed working with him and discussing his plans to ensure that Catholic Education remains an organisation that is effective, trusted and considered a leader in P-12 education, whilst remaining faithful to our Vision and the Church's mission in Far North Queensland.

## Major Activities

- The commissioning of the new Executive Director of Education, Diarmuid O'Riordan.
- The Official Opening and Blessing of the new centralised head office of CEDC at 232 Mulgrave Rd, Westcourt.
- Reviewing the organisation's financial structure, cash flow and budget processes to ensure its continued sustainability.
- Assisting the Queensland Catholic Education Commission to prepare for its transition to a new corporate and legal framework as Catholic Education Queensland Limited (CEQL) from the beginning of 2026.

## Board Members 2025

Mr Warren Dunn – Chair

Ms Marie Leonie Sequeira – Deputy Chair

Mr Andrew Cornes

Mr Vince Mesumeci

Mr Bob Epps

Fr Sabu Kalapurackal – Vicar for Education

Mr Diarmuid O'Riordan (ex-officio)

Mr Ian Davis (ex-officio)

Dr Andrea O'Brien (ex-officio)



232 Mulgrave Road CEDC Office

# About Us

Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns is a dynamic and growing organisation that actively invites co-creation, enabling a system of schools that are places of rich learning for now and into the future.

Our vision is to offer every student in every school a world-class education enriched by their lived encounter with the Catholic Faith.

Catholic Education Services (CES) is committed to this vision through co-leadership with schools to build communities of learning that provide a safe, nurturing and academically challenging environment.

Our schools are places where we create opportunities for every student and every staff member so that they are inspired to contribute to our society, innovate, explore possibilities, and achieve excellence.



## Our Schools

 **30**  
Schools in total

 **8**  
Secondary colleges

 **20**  
Primary schools

 **2**  
P-12 schools



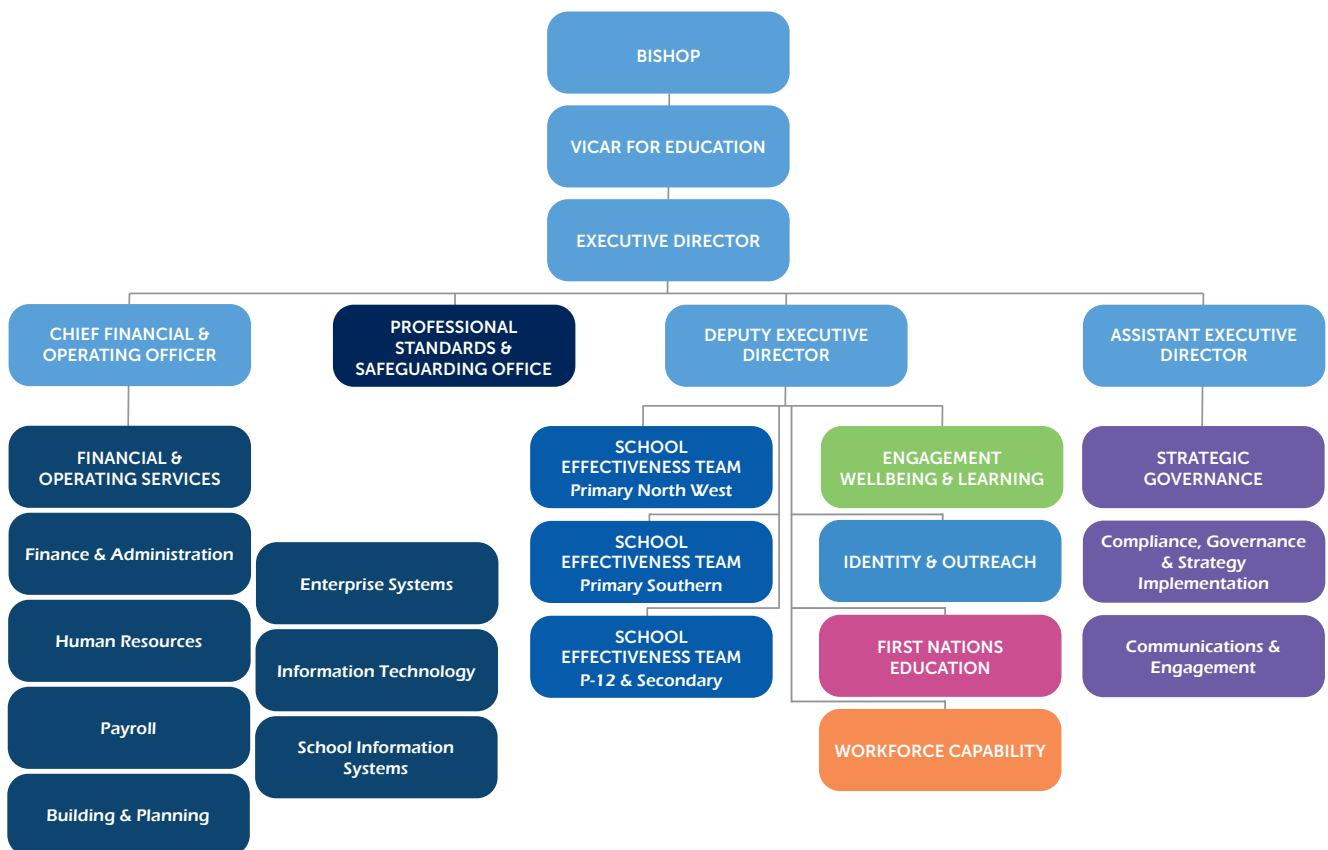
# Governance

Leadership and strategic management of Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns is the responsibility of the Executive Director of Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns. Through a team of professionals, and in co-leadership with Principals, the Executive Director manages and facilitates a number of significant delegations which include:

- Support of the mission of the Church as delivered through Catholic Education.
- Support of schools by providing services that strengthen school capacity.
- Provision of leadership and forward planning to develop organisational capability.
- Distribution to schools of government allocated funds and their accountability.
- Monitoring quality of schools and compliance/accountability with requirements of governments, Church, and parents.
- Within limits, provision of some centralised, specialised student services, where this is the most effective and efficient approach.

Our staff are supported to experience success and satisfaction in their vital roles.

## CEDC Organisational Structure



## Executive Leadership Group



**Bishop  
Joe Caddy AM**  
Bishop of Cairns



**Fr Sabu  
Kalapurackal**  
Vicar for Education



**Diarmuid  
O'Riordan**  
Executive Director



**Ian Davis**  
Deputy Executive  
Director



**Dr Andrea O'Brien**  
Assistant  
Executive Director



**Paul McArthur**  
Chief Financial &  
Operating Officer

## Strategic Leadership Team

The broader Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) provides support and advice to the Executive Leadership Group across all Directorates and is strengthened by co-leadership meetings which include Principals.



**Diarmuid  
O'Riordan**  
Executive  
Director



**Ian Davis**  
Deputy Executive  
Director



**Dr Andrea O'Brien**  
Assistant  
Executive Director



**Paul McArthur**  
Chief Financial &  
Operating Officer



**Brooke Daniels**  
Director  
Engagement  
Wellbeing &  
Learning



**Rachel McLean**  
Director Identity  
& Outreach



**Wayne Wood**  
Director School  
Effectiveness  
P-12 & Secondary



**Lea Martin**  
Director School  
Effectiveness  
Primary



**Sr Ann-Maree  
Nicholls**  
Director School  
Effectiveness  
Primary



**Mel Turner**  
Director School  
Effectiveness  
Primary



**Juanita Selwood**  
Director First  
Nations Education



**Marissa Clark**  
Director Workforce  
Capability

# CEDC Strategic Directions 2021–2025

Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns (CEDC) launched Strategic Directions 2021–2025 in 2021 with 10 interlinked priorities aimed at transforming key domains of education across the Diocese. Overall, implementation has been strong – most strategic goals have been met or progressed, underscored by system-wide improvements in faith formation, student support frameworks, workforce capacity, First Nations education, data-informed governance and extensive work on key enablers.

## Key Achievements (2021–2025)

### Broad Stakeholder Buy-In & Shared Vision

More than 1,000 stakeholders (staff, students and parents) contributed to forming Strategic Directions 2021–2025, resulting in strong system-wide commitment.

By 2025 the Strategic Directions vision is owned by all, with regular feedback loops (surveys and forums) keeping stakeholders engaged.

This collaborative approach has laid a foundation for success across initiatives and contributed to our journey into connected autonomy as a system.



### Systems Modernisation & Governance

Project Planning templates and approval processes were developed and enacted. Line of sight planning from Strategic Directions through School Strategic and Annual Improvement Plans and Directorate plans into individual PGIAPs aligned the work.

Foundational improvements in IT, Student Information Systems and data have increased the system's effectiveness. A new Data and Information Governance Framework and live dashboard reporting now provide real-time insights into key metrics for decision-makers across directorates and continues to evolve.

Budget processes were explicitly linked to Strategic Directions to ensure purposeful, aligned expenditure.



### Key Projects & Initiatives

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Veritas – CEDC Staff Portal rebuild</li><li>• Encounter Catholic Identity Framework</li><li>• Page-Up: Attraction &amp; Recruitment</li><li>• SAIP processes and alignment</li><li>• Directorate planning linked to Strategic Directions</li><li>• Teacher Scholarship Program</li><li>• Learning Dashboard</li><li>• Leadership &amp; Career stage development</li><li>• Multi-Tiered Systems of Support –</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Engagement (MTSS-E)</li><li>• MTSS-A (Academics)</li><li>• MyCE Parent Application</li><li>• Project Compass – CES restructure</li><li>• Project Synergy – commenced</li><li>• Generative AI pilot</li><li>• Clarity</li><li>• Differentiation (Curriculum, Planning, Assessment and Reporting+E)</li><li>• First Nations Education Strategy</li><li>• Organisational Culture Statement</li><li>• DIBELS screener – system approach</li><li>• CES office relocation and refurbishment</li></ul> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|





## Areas for Improvement & Ongoing Challenges

Despite strong overall progress, there are several identified areas where progress was limited or goals remain in progress:

### First Nations Student Outcomes

While enrolments and cultural support have improved, closing the achievement gap for First Nations students is still a work in progress. This remains a moral and strategic imperative.

### Student Wellbeing & Early Literacy

The MTSS framework is currently being embedded across the Diocese. Ensuring it translates to measurable gains in wellbeing (e.g. mental health, engagement) and bolstering literacy support in early grades will require ongoing focus.

### Religious Education Engagement

Engagement in Religious Education has improved slightly, but not to the extent desired. Deepening student engagement in faith learning is an area for ongoing focus, ensuring Religion classes are contemporary and meaningful for students.

### Staffing – Rural & Remote

Teacher retention in regional schools remains challenging. Despite Grow Our Own and other initiatives, attracting and keeping quality staff, particularly in rural and remote communities, continues to lag behind urban areas. Additional incentives, support, and innovative staffing models may be needed to fully realise equity for regional, rural and remote schools.

### CES Cross-Team Collaboration & Ownership

The 2023 internal review noted that consistent collaboration across CES teams and clarity in accountability could be strengthened. As the organisation implemented many new strategies, some overlap or ambiguity in roles emerged. Refining implementation protocols (e.g. clear work descriptions, avoiding siloed efforts) is an ongoing task to maximise effectiveness, and will be ongoing work for Project Compass in 2026.

## Scope Management

The breadth of the Strategic Directions 2021–2025 (10 priorities) was ambitious with The Brown Collective review cautioning against scope creep and overly additive initiatives. CEDC, however, managed to progress the majority of priorities by phasing focus in annual work plans that incorporated both priority work and the enablers. A sharper focus will be required in subsequent planning along with transparency of prioritisation processes.

## Conclusion

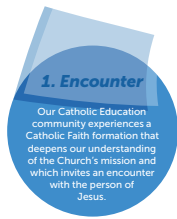
By the close of 2025, Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns has substantially delivered on Strategic Directions 2021–2025. The strategic priorities were largely executed as planned by Design Teams, delivering stronger Catholic identity, better support for First Nations students and more consistent teaching and wellbeing practices.

The execution of the majority of the 10 priorities, and numerous enablers have resulted in tangible improvements:

- A community grounded more firmly in Catholic identity
- Greater equity and inclusion
- More consistent and high-quality learning and teaching practices
- Better support for First Nations students
- A stronger and more supported workforce
- An empowered workforce
- Modernised, data-informed practices
- Enhanced infrastructure underpinning outcomes for students.

*Strategic Directions 2021–2025* was not just a static plan but a living framework that guided annual actions and built a culture of connected autonomy across the system of schools. These insights ensure that the next Strategic Directions (2026–2028) will build on a solid foundation with an even sharper focus, as CEDC continues its mission to offer every student in every school a world-class education enriched by their lived encounter with the Catholic faith.

## Priorities Progress (2021–2025)



**Intended Outcome:** *Our Catholic Education community experiences a Catholic faith formation that deepens our understanding of the Church's mission and which offers an encounter with the person of Jesus.*

**2025 Status & Progress:** **Achieved.**

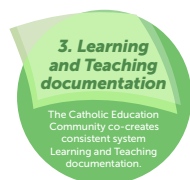
- The Encounter Catholic Identity Framework is fully embedded and alignment with other frameworks is ongoing.
- All staff are offered dedicated faith formation programs, vs. ad-hoc efforts prior to 2021.
- In 2025, 92% of staff and 93% of parents affirmed the system's Catholic identity, with incremental improvements for both, but remaining fairly consistent.
- Student voice forums were established in 2024 and expanded in 2025.



**Intended Outcome:** *Every student benefits from an engaging, contemporary and personally relevant religious education curriculum.*

**2025 Status & Progress:** **Achieved.**

- Religious Education offerings have been bolstered by staff upskilling and by ensuring each school's Religious Education program meets diocesan standards.
- 69 teachers have earned post-grad Religious Education qualifications from 2021 to 2025.
- Stakeholder feedback on Catholic identity and Religious Education is very positive (consistent high 90% approval).
- A slight improvement in student engagement with Religious Education lessons was recorded (+2% in student survey since 2023), and continuing to deepen student engagement remains a focus.
- All 30 schools deliver a compliant, locally adapted Religious Education curriculum.



**Intended Outcome:** *The Catholic Education Community co-creates consistent system Learning and Teaching documentation.*

**2025 Status & Progress:** **Partially Achieved.**

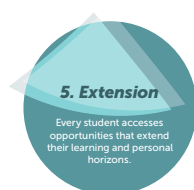
- A CEDC Mathematics Framework has been developed.
- Staff Feedback Survey agreeance that the school's L&T documentation is useful has dropped by 5%: 94%–89% from 2021 to 2025.
- Developing consistency in some areas has improved alignment of classroom practice with strategic goals. (All 30 schools have implemented the updated Religious Education curriculum and DIBELS literacy screening tools for early years in 2025).
- MTSS-A (Academics) was introduced in 2024 to focus on reading and mathematics.



**Intended Outcome:** *First Nations communities and families are honoured, their cultures and beliefs respected, and our schools committed to Closing the Gap imperatives for every First Nations student.*

**2025 Status & Progress:** **Significant Progress.**

- A CEDC First Nations Education Strategy has been developed.
- The Reconciliation Action Plan is embedded and actioned.
- Indigenous enrolment grew from 10% to 12% of students (and 3.5% of staff), reflecting improved outreach and inclusion.
- Nulung-Kayn Kasi leadership forums for Indigenous student leaders were introduced.
- Strong partnerships with local Elders and institutes (James Cook University) now inform policy and curriculum.



**Intended Outcome:** *Every student accesses opportunities that extend their learning and personal horizons.*

**2025 Status & Progress:** **Limited Progress.**

- Students benefited from generally strong academic programs: by 2025, 58% of CEDC graduates earned vocational qualifications and 97.6% achieved a QCE/QCIA.
- The percentage of CEDC students achieving Exceeding in NAPLAN domains is below national in all areas in 2025, except for Year 7 Reading and Year 9 Writing and G&P.
- This priority was not progressed centrally during 2021–25, suggesting extension activities were handled contextually by each school.



**Intended Outcome:** *Every student benefits from inspiring, engaging, and highly professional teachers, school leaders and support and professional staff.*

**2025 Status & Progress:** **Achieved / Ongoing.**

- CEDC's Grow Our Own program and scholarships were developed and implemented to ease future teacher shortages. The first undergraduate cohort is due to graduate in 2026. Scholarship Undergraduate program is at full capacity with 20 students.
- Final Year Education Student Scholarships have attracted 27 teachers over three years to CEDC.
- Dedicated career stage professional learning and support has been developed, strengthening leadership pipelines and leading to better succession planning.
- Early career teacher numbers reached 22 first-year and 25 second-year teachers in 2025. Further work is required to surface this data reliably in Ascender.
- Staff feedback surveys show high agreeance with having access to relevant professional development: 88% in 2025, which is relatively steady.



## Priorities Progress (2021–2025) continued...

### 7. Learning pathways

Every student's learning pathway is enabled by adjustments to learning experiences, targets, interventions and initiatives, and monitors improvement over time.

**Intended Outcome:** *Every student's learning pathway enables adjustments to learning experiences, targets interventions and initiatives, and monitors improvement over time.*

#### 2025 Status & Progress: **Achieved / Ongoing.**

- CEDC implemented a system-wide Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) for student engagement and learning.
- By 2025, 90% of schools (27 of 30) have MTSS frameworks in place to systematically identify and support students' academic and behavioral needs. This led to more consistent intervention practices across schools.
- Attendance rates – a key indicator of engagement – rebounded post-COVID (the percentage of students attending >90% of days rose from a low of 34% in 2022 to 61% in 2025), however haven't fully recovered.
- Schools now universally use data dashboards to track student progress and adjust supports in real time.

### 8. Significant learning needs

Every student with significant learning needs (eg disability, EAL/D) receives adjustments and interventions to enable equitable access and participation in learning.

**Intended Outcome:** *Every student with significant learning needs (e.g. disability and EALD) receives adjustments and interventions to enable equitable access and participation in learning.*

#### 2025 Status & Progress: **Progressed.**

- The expansion of learning support staff and the MTSS framework have improved identification and service to students with learning support needs.
- All schools adopted new inclusive education guidelines and tools.
- Parent surveys indicate appreciation for support of diverse learners: 'My child's learning needs (support/enrichment) are being met at this school' achieved 88% agreeance in 2025, up 2% from 2023.

### 9. Transitions

Every student experiences a seamless and positive transition through and across schools.

**Intended Outcome:** *Every student experiences a seamless and positive transition through and across schools.*

#### 2025 Status & Progress: **Partial Progress.**

- The Diocese opened a new college in Smithfield to accommodate growth and provide local continuity of schooling. Co-located on a JCU campus, it provides unparalleled opportunities for collaborative learning opportunities and facility access, enhancing transitions to further study.
- Transition programs (e.g. Prep and Year 6–7 orientation initiatives) exist in many schools, but this priority did not receive a dedicated system-wide program during 2021–25.

### 10. Rural and remote

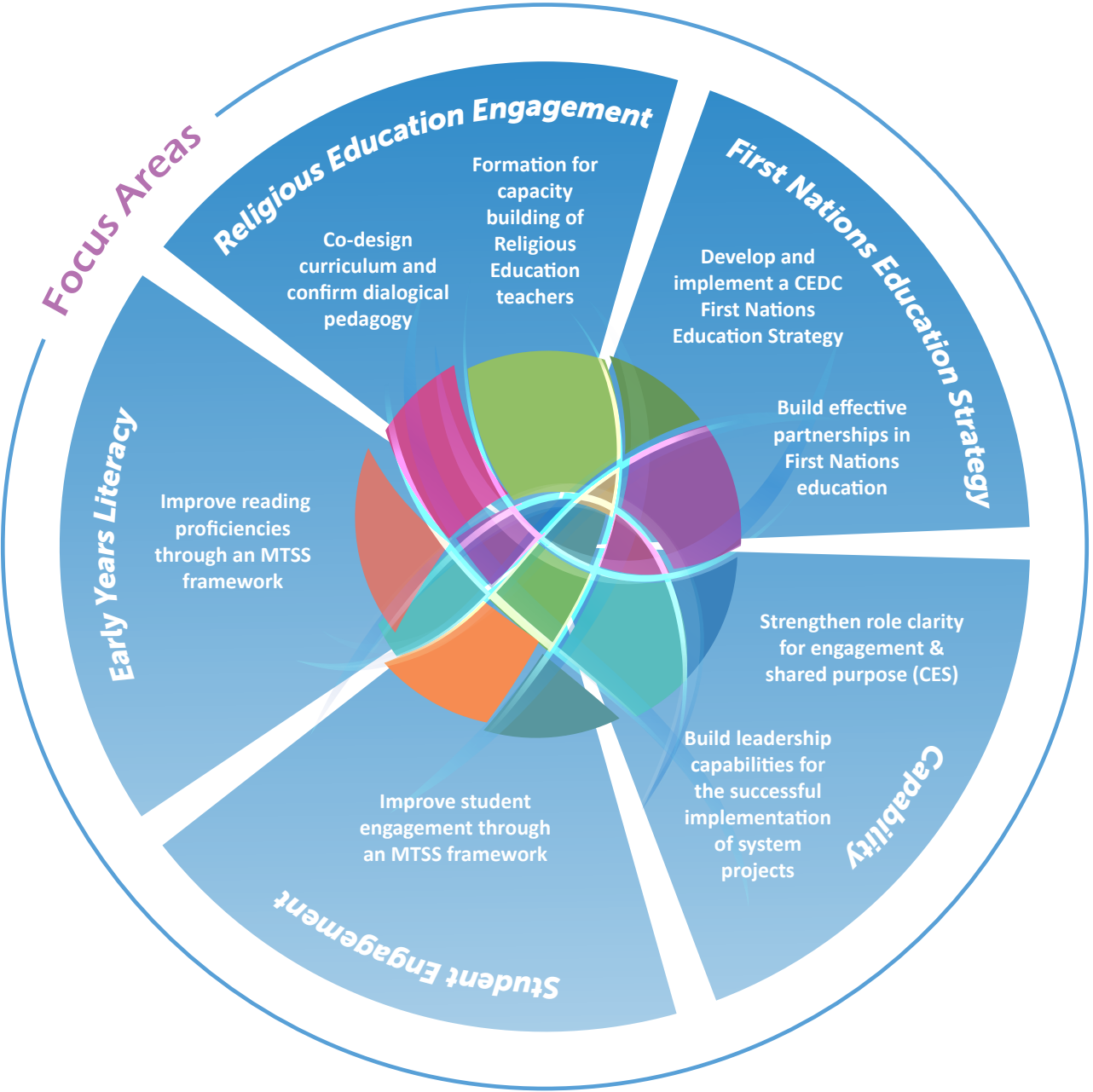
Every student from rural and remote communities benefits from targeted support for their schools.

**Intended Outcome:** *Every student from rural and remote communities benefits from targeted support for their schools.*

#### 2025 Status & Progress: **Limited Progress.**

- The growing schools at Mount Peter and Smithfield (serving growing fringe communities) and infrastructure upgrades at other school sites have improved access.
- Initiatives like the First Nations Strategy and Grow Our Own teacher program particularly benefit remote schools by fostering local talent.
- Despite these efforts, rural staffing and student outcomes still lag in some areas, mirroring the challenge of remote retention.

Enablers



# Encounter Catholic Identity

## Highlights

1. Leadership, coordination and delivery of the **Australian Catholic Education Conference (ACEC)** and **pre/post-Conference experiences**.
2. Delivery of planned **Formation across the four stages of the employee life cycle**, transitioning from discrete events to intentional school and system Formation Plans.
3. Delivery of **P–12 Religious Education** that is locally responsive and aligned to BCE and QCAA requirements with some schools moving into the review and renewal stage.
4. Embedding understanding of **Student Voice** through the delivery of CES Student Forums and the development of a CEDC Student Empowerment Framework informed by student dialogue.
5. Strengthened **workforce theological literacy**, with sustained investment in accreditation pathways and sponsorship of staff completing the Graduate Certificate of Religious Education.
6. Leadership capacity building for **Catholic Dialogue Schools**, forming leaders in dialogue, spiritual conversation and theological reflection as core leadership dispositions.

## Summary

The highlight of 2025 was the culmination of 18 months of dreaming, visioning, collaboration, planning and coordinating to bring the Australian Catholic Education Conference, co-hosted by NCEC and CEDC, to life. Leaders of Catholic Identity were central to bringing the heart of our Catholic faith to life throughout the conference, through the moving and uplifting Eucharistic Celebration to the prayerful presence across the program and the beautifully curated chapel space. Staff in CES and the Diocese worked tirelessly to ensure there was authentic student voice and engagement through the Mass, Welcome and Speaking to Country, cultural dance, music ministry, chapel prayer, liturgical dance and art displays. A key highlight of ACEC was the wonderful student panel, which added a richness and authenticity that deeply resonated with delegates and showcased the diversity of our local school communities and students across Australia.

Members of the Identity and Outreach (I&O), Workforce Capability and First Nations Education teams were also instrumental in hosting and delivering four pre- and post-conference on- and in-country experiences for local staff and participants of ACEC.

As the 2021–2025 Strategic Directions comes to a close, I&O has reflected positively on the work they have done in delivering **Strategic Direction 1: Encounter Catholic Identity** across CEDC, particularly when collaborating with leaders in schools and other directorates including Workforce Capability; First Nations Education; Strategic Governance & Engagement; and Engagement, Wellbeing and Learning.

The *Encounter Catholic Identity* Framework continues to be embedded across policies, frameworks, formation experiences and communication channels, providing a shared language for Catholic identity grounded in dialogue, encounter and discernment. Staff and parent feedback continues to affirm this work, with more than **90% agreeance** that Catholic





Australian Catholic Youth Festival pilgrimage

identity is authentically animated across CEDC. Engagement with families as first formators remains a priority, alongside the creation of contextual prayer resources and retreat experiences for staff and students, and music ministry for youth engagement.

In **Religious Education**, all schools are delivering compliant, locally responsive Religious Education curricula. While student engagement in Religious Education has improved slightly, data indicates this remains an area requiring further attention, particularly in bridging classroom experience with lived encounter of faith. A review of the Senior Religious Education Curriculum was commenced in November 2025.

**Student Participation** was led with tenacity by members of the Identity and Outreach team. Student Voice Forums revealed both the capacity and desire of students to contribute meaningfully to learning, wellbeing and school life. This work directly informed the development of a **CEDC Student Empowerment Framework**, shifting

practice from consultation to shared responsibility. Student Participation has been recognised as a core enabler of the 2026-28 Strategic Directions.

I&O continued to invest heavily in building theological literacy and accreditation pathways. Sponsorship of staff completing the Graduate Certificate of Religious Education has resulted in 109 staff engaging in the project with a growing number of graduates moving into senior leadership roles, strengthening system capacity over time.

I&O respond creatively with intentional, ongoing and reflective experiences of faith formation, towards enhanced spiritual awareness, theological understanding, and capability for service in the Church and in the world. Diverse audiences are invited into a range of experiences and journeys with an effective focus on spiritual growth and discipleship in our CEDC context.



In country experience for ACEC Delegates



Jubilee pilgrimage to Rome



# First Nations

## Highlights

1. The annual Nulung-Kayn Kasi event at St Mary's Catholic College, Woree where 29 student leaders received a badge on the night. By the end of 2025, there were 50+ First Nations students elected and recognised as leaders in schools.
2. Launch of City to Country STEM Project in collaboration with Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Waiben and BCE schools, St Finbarr's and St Thomas More College, and funded by the Yadha Muru Foundation.
3. First Nations Education team attended the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council Assembly: Pilgrims of Hope in Newcastle along with First Nations students, ILOs and parishioners.
4. Presented the First Nations Education Strategy at the Term 4 Senior Leadership Conference.
5. Reconciliation Action Plan deliverables continue to be progressed. Primary Principals participated in Narragunnawali workshop. Secured procurement of First Nations-owned ferry business in Waiben: Time & Tide.
6. Reconciliation Week Film Night at St Stephen's Catholic College, Mareeba to commemorate Mabo Day with 48 attendees. Collaborated with St Therese's School, Bentley Park for NAIDOC in the Park celebrations.



City to Country Project - Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Waiben team at STEM Mad Brisbane



Nulung-Kayn Kasi event at St Mary's Catholic College, Woree

## Summary

Nulung-Kayn Kasi virtual check-ins featuring First Nations guest speakers for student leaders was facilitated once a term. The virtual check-ins offer valuable opportunities for student leaders to come together, hear from inspiring First Nations guest speakers, and strengthen their leadership skills.

The City to Country project team presented their prototypes at the STEM Mad Brisbane competition and won the People's Choice Award. Following this, the team was selected to showcase at the STEM Mad National Showcase in Adelaide. The students also received a surprise visit and inspiring talk from the 2025 Young Australian of the year, Dr Katrina Wruck who is a First Nations scientist and chemical engineer.

The First Nations team participated and assisted with facilitating the Kaurareg in-country experiences with the Identity and Outreach team.

The First Nations Education team facilitated four termly Indigenous Liaison Officer (ILO) Network Days. The ILO team engaged in AIATSIS training modules: Culturally Responsive Teaching. Network Days included sessions facilitated by the Performance and Analytics team and Workforce Capability team.

The First Nations Education Strategy development progressed through engagement of First Nations staff (ILOs), schools and CES leadership. This included a literature review of First Nations policies, strategies and current research, and a review of CEDC data and Closing the Gap data.

The team developed and delivered the Young Men and Young Women's Business programs aimed at building confidence and connection for the boarding students at Mount St Bernard College, Herberton.



# Engagement, Wellbeing & Learning

## Highlights

1. Engagement, Wellbeing & Learning (EWL) delivered 5,144 hours of staff support and 7,314 sessions to support students with disabilities, actioned 488 school requests, and provided targeted assistance to 1,179 students with significant needs across Catholic education in 2025.
2. Professional learning remained a high impact strategy, with 94% reporting increased knowledge and 92% confirming significant relevance to role across 128 sessions and 1,747 attendees, demonstrating strong return on investment in building staff capability.
3. Schools' achievements in curriculum and inclusion compliance have resulted in 100% of CEDC schools on track for QCAA implementation of ACARA V9 and fully engaged in NCCD moderation, with disability prevalence reaching a record 18.4%. EWL updated personalised planning guidance with input from 30 schools, strengthening inclusion for students with significant needs.
4. All primary schools used DIBELS data to strengthen early literacy, complemented by ACU reading modules, synthetic phonics and new literacy resources. These initiatives improved teacher capability and produced a 12% gain in Prep-Year 6 reading proficiency.
5. Through the ACU partnership, 50% of primary schools joined the numeracy project, with all middle leaders improving mathematical and pedagogical knowledge, and 94% reporting stronger confidence and capability to lead whole school numeracy initiatives.
6. Twenty-four schools completed MTSS-E reviews; two-thirds showed strong Tier 1 practices, with others continuing this focus. MTSS-E has correlated with a three-year decline of major behaviours in CEDC primary schools. A Tier 3 systemic response to student sexualised behaviour was introduced, with professional learning delivered to leaders across 30 schools.
7. AI governance advanced with the Generative AI Position Statement, Gen AI Risk Model, Teacher Ready Reckoner and Student Use Table, supporting safe, ethical AI use. The Copilot 365 trial showed 72% of teaching staff reported workload reduction when planning lessons, prompting expansion to two more schools in 2026.
8. School Counsellors supported 3,766 students through 41,014 face to face sessions, with mental health concerns the primary focus — reflecting significant demand for counselling and wellbeing support across school communities

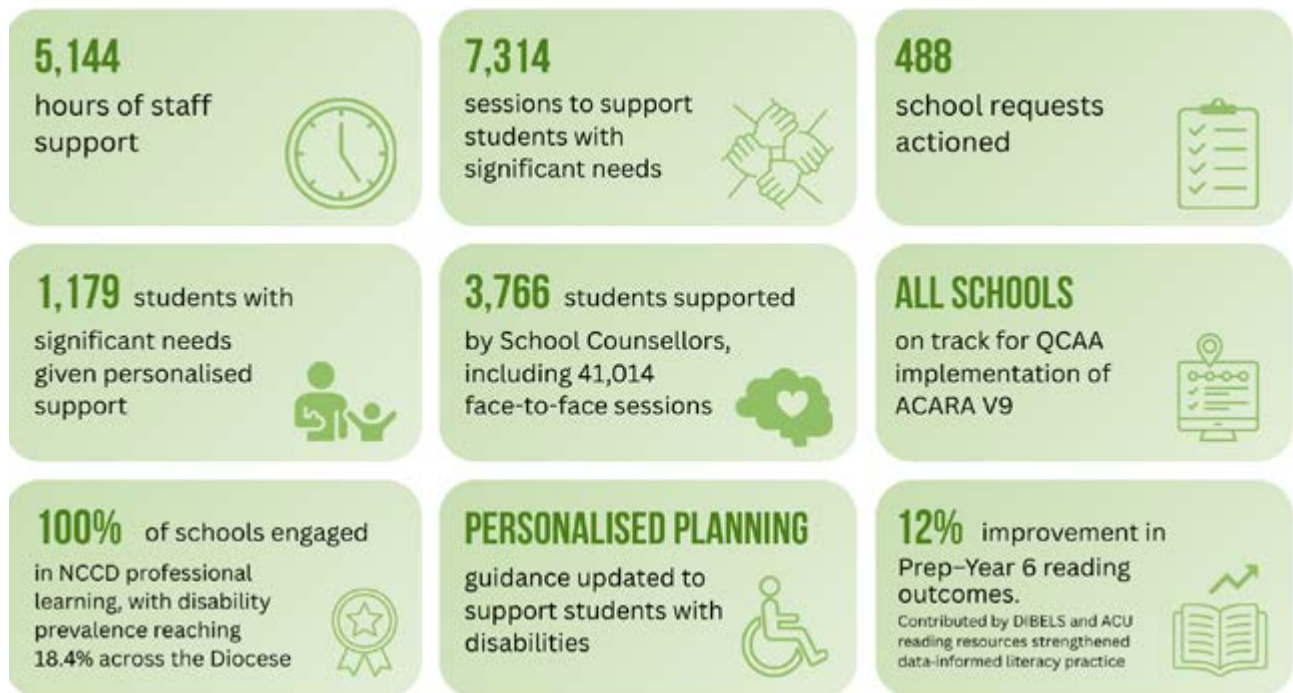
## Summary

EWL includes seven specialist teams providing service delivery to schools. These teams include Diversity, Psychology & Counselling, Therapy Services, two Learning & Teaching teams,

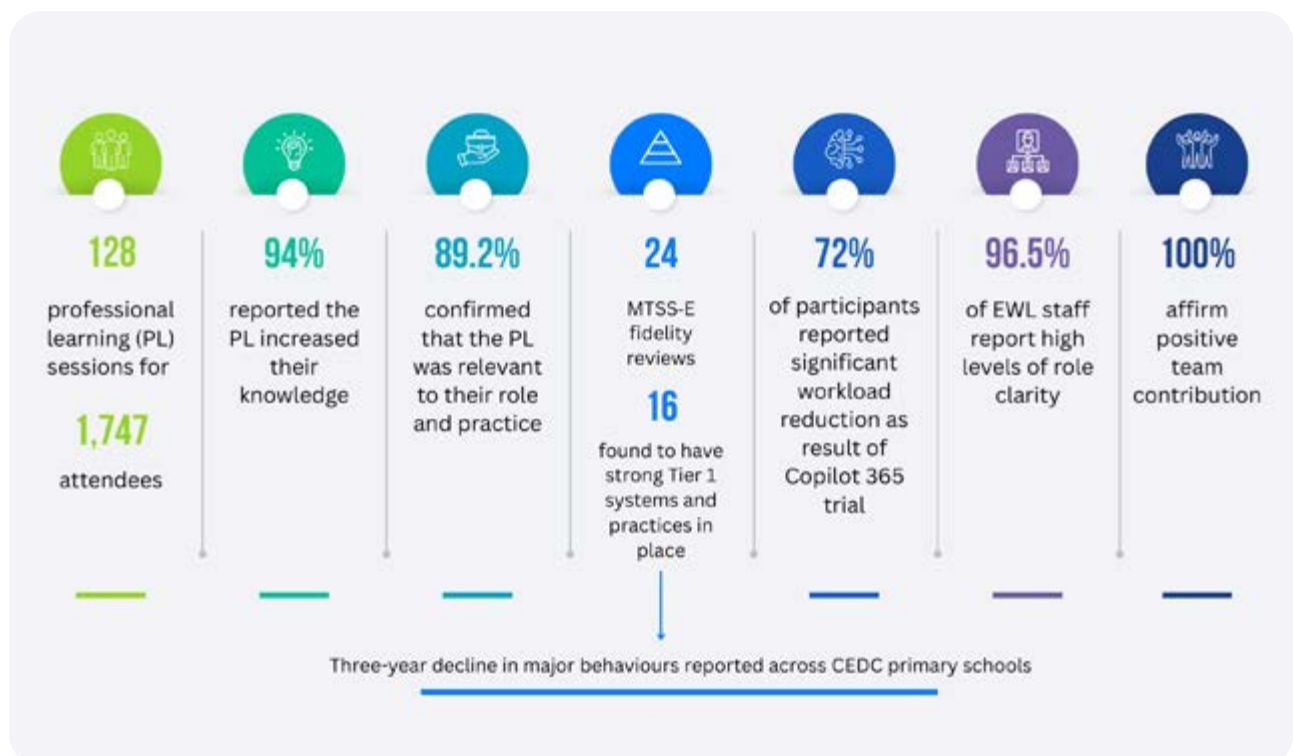
Student Engagement and an administration support team. Service delivery is provided to all 30 schools throughout the school year.



## Service Delivery Impact Snapshot



## Capability, Culture & Innovation Impact Snapshot





# Workforce Capability

## Highlights

1. The Grow Our Own strategy strengthened CEDC's teacher pipeline through Aspire to Teach, scholarship retention, enhanced induction for early career teachers and mentors, and support for Highly Accomplished & Lead Teacher (HALT) accreditation.
2. An organisational culture statement reached final consultation, signalling a commitment to positive culture and ways of working, and supporting schools to develop clear, locally-aligned staff expectations.
3. CEDC delivered its first system-wide induction program, Faithful Beginnings, giving all new employees a consistent introduction. Career-stage induction pathways were refined to strengthen school leadership.
4. Professional learning was enhanced through targeted capability development across the system. This included the Piece by Piece: Highly Effective Teams program, as well as AITSL-aligned middle leader induction.
5. A comprehensive research project progressed, informing a renewed, evidence-based approach to professional learning across CEDC.
6. Project Compass delivered a system-wide review of CES organisational structure and service delivery to ensure alignment with future Strategic Directions.



Leadership Programs Encounter, Kaurareg

## Summary

Staff attraction, development and retention remained a key strategic focus in 2025, with continued implementation of the Grow Our Own strategy supporting the long-term sustainability of the CEDC teaching workforce. Expansion of the Aspire to Teach program strengthened early engagement with teaching as a career, particularly through increased collaboration between secondary colleges and feeder primary schools. Strong alignment between Aspire to Teach participation and scholarship applications continues to support future workforce supply.

Scholarship pathways and university partnerships ensured a steady flow of graduate teachers into CEDC schools. Retention across scholarship cohorts remained strong, contributing to workforce stability, alongside Return of Service graduates and Permission to Teach appointments, which provided short-term staffing support. CEDC recognised two teachers for achieving Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) certification in 2025.

Engagement in system-led professional learning for early career teachers remained consistent in 2025, with 65% participation from first-year teachers and 54% from second-year teachers.

However, reduced system-level capacity to provide direct support highlighted the increasing importance of school-based mentoring.

Strengthening mentor capability has been identified as a critical lever for sustaining early career teacher support, retention and success. In response, a Mentor Essentials professional learning program has been developed for implementation in 2026.

Research evidence also confirms that the quality of preservice teachers' school placement experiences significantly influences future employment decisions. This reinforces the importance of a deliberate and strategic approach to developing high-quality placement supervision and mentoring within schools, aligned with workforce sustainability priorities.

Induction remained a key priority in 2025 to ensure a coherent and consistent entry into roles across CEDC. Faithful Beginnings, in its first year of development, was delivered system-wide as the foundational induction for all new employees.

Complementary role-specific induction programs offered targeted preparation at key transition points, with Middle Leader Induction aligned to AITSL standards and the Principal Induction Program continuing to provide support.



CEDC Year 12 Scholarship recipients

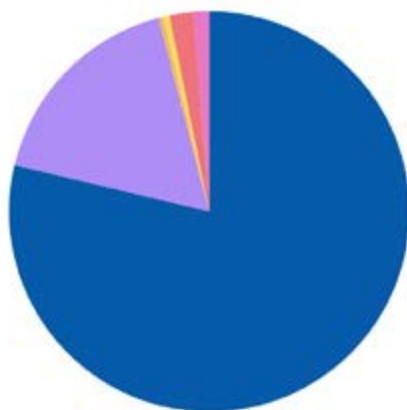


Highly effective teams - Piece by Piece participants



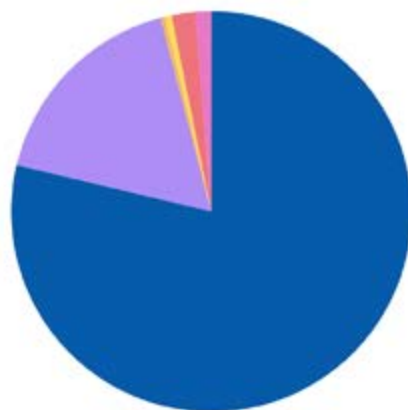
CEDC Organisational Culture Statement

# Finance



2024 Total Revenue - \$314,038,475

- 76.4% Government grants-recurrent + capital
- 17.1% School fees and levies
- 0.4% P & F Association
- 0.5% Interest Received
- 2.0% Trading Income
- 3.5% Other revenue

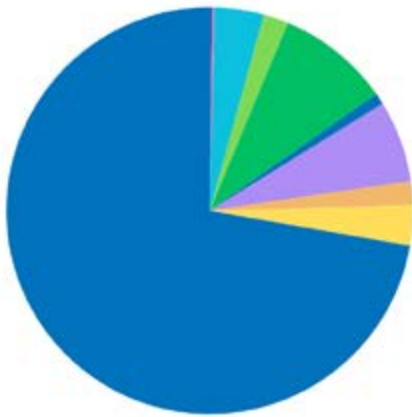


2025 Total Revenue - \$341,775,847

- 78.8% Government grants-recurrent + capital
- 17.2% School fees and levies
- 0.4% P & F Association
- 0.5% Interest Received
- 1.9% Trading Income
- 1.3% Other revenue

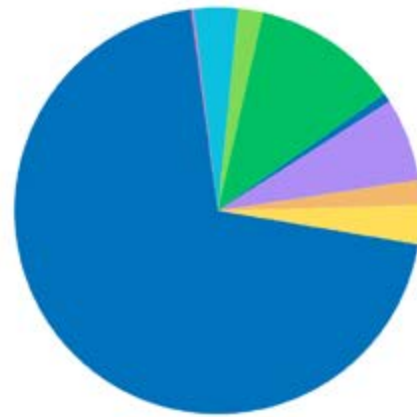






#### 2024 Total Expenses - \$311,496,878

|       |                               |
|-------|-------------------------------|
| 0.9%  | Boarding                      |
| 6.5%  | Depreciation and Amortisation |
| 1.9%  | Interest Expense              |
| 3.2%  | Site Operations               |
| 72.5% | Employee expenses             |
| 0.2%  | System levies                 |
| 3.9%  | Tuition expenses              |
| 2.0%  | Trading                       |
| 9.0%  | Other expenses                |



#### 2025 Total Expenses - \$326,580,259

|       |                               |
|-------|-------------------------------|
| 0.7%  | Boarding                      |
| 6.6%  | Depreciation and Amortisation |
| 2.0%  | Interest Expense              |
| 3.1%  | Site Operations               |
| 70.3% | Employee expenses             |
| 0.2%  | System levies                 |
| 3.5%  | Tuition expenses              |
| 2.0%  | Trading                       |
| 11.7% | Other expenses                |

2024 total expenses \$311,496,878

2025 total expenses \$326,580,259











Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns  
ABN 42 498 340 094  
232 Mulgrave Road, Westcourt Qld 4870  
(07) 4050 9700  
[office@cns.catholic.edu.au](mailto:office@cns.catholic.edu.au)  
[www.cns.catholic.edu.au](http://www.cns.catholic.edu.au)



**Catholic  
Education**  
Diocese of Cairns

*Learning with Faith and Vision*