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Dear Friends,

‘Good News’ for Young People in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains

Over the past few weeks you may have seen media coverage about how Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta (CEDP) is looking to further strengthen the Catholic faith of our young people through a review of the Religious Education Curriculum. With so many parents entrusting CEDP to teach their children the Catholic faith in our schools, the Diocese of Parramatta takes this responsibility extremely seriously. This letter is to update you on the current status of this exciting and evolving project.

Our Church teaches that parents and guardians are the first educators of their children. They have an obligation and right to educate their offspring (Canon 793 §1). I can assure everyone concerned that the Draft New Curriculum is firmly based in Catholic Scripture, Tradition and Context, focused on sharing the faith with students as well as encouraging them to become attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible Catholic adults.

The Religious Education Curriculum review process is not finalised. Right now, in Term 3 2020, we are trialling our first draft.

Following the trial, there will be opportunities for you to share your feedback for further refinement moving forward.

An up-to-date approach in the tradition of Catholic thought

As Catholic educators, we are working to better align with the sound educational principles behind effective student learning.

This new approach has been developed based on the big questions students themselves ask about life and their relationship with God. We understand their need to take an active role in finding the answers, in turn helping them to be more open to accepting and living our Church’s precious teachings at a deeper level.

Children always have lots of questions. You may be interested to know that the approach behind the new curriculum has been practised in Catholic education for centuries as illustrated in the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas developed more than 700 years ago. It consists of looking to our Catholic faith for answers to challenging questions arising from different scenarios. Pope Francis recently affirmed this method when he advised leaders in the Church not to simply continue answering “questions people are no longer asking.”

Working together as a Catholic community

The process of reviewing the Religious Education Curriculum began in 2014, by speaking to parents, clergy, teachers and students, through research conducted by Catholic educational experts at the University of Notre Dame. There have been 23 stages of review including consultation with teachers and students in 2016, learning frameworks developed by clergy and others in 2017, clergy and parent advisory groups in 2018 and trials and parental observations in 2019.



I enclose a full list of the steps we have undertaken so far, and those that are planned to come. Our intention is to have a transparent process. Numerous Church documents especially from the Congregation for Catholic Education underpin our approach which will be included in the final version of the Curriculum as a resource for teachers.

We look forward to the launch of the new Religious Education Curriculum and we continue to consult widely. The final version of the curriculum will be rolled out only when all stages of the process are complete.

Current Media Commentary

In recent days, we have seen one or two elements of the new curriculum discussed in the media. Unfortunately, some media outlets are not presenting the new curriculum accurately, particularly its teaching content.

Religious Education in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Parramatta will continue to give our young people a deeper understanding of *God, Jesus, Church, Prayer, Sacraments, Sacred Scripture and Christian Life*.

More information

We understand that many of you may have questions.

The Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta website contains podcasts and videos which discuss and demonstrate the rationale and the process we have followed. These can be found at <https://www.parra.catholic.edu.au/News-and-Events/Planning-for-the-Future/New-curriculum-to-connect-faith-learning-and-life>.

We also have a dedicated email address for your questions. Please send any questions you may have to feedback@parra.catholic.edu.au.

The process is evolving, and we are keen to hear from our Catholic community. We will keep you updated.

Like you, we want to share the gift of our Catholic faith with the young people of Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains.

Yours in Christ,

Very Rev Christopher de Souza

Vicar General

Episcopal Vicar for Education & Formation