

Networking Among Catholic Schools – Helpful Practices to Strengthen the Whole System

RATIONALE

- Catholic schools benefit when they promote and foster their local linkages. The whole Catholic school system is strengthened by individual schools supporting each other.
 - Catholic schools operate from a policy of working for the common good in society. By acting as a supportive community network of schools in a given locality they will strengthen the larger communities of which they are a part.
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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Most Catholic schools have traditionally had a variety of links with other Catholic schools (usually without crossing the primary/secondary divide). There have been visits or exchanges of news between schools run by the same Religious Order, sporting or cultural exchanges, shared celebrations, occasional shared Masses or other liturgies, and so on.
- 1.2 In recent years a further range of linkages and networks has begun to emerge in some areas, as it has become apparent that there is much to be gained for the whole system when schools think in terms of networking. These benefits can be spiritual, social, educational, and can help promote Catholic attendance at Catholic schools.

2.0 Co-operative Practices

- 2.1 Described below are some examples of co-operative practices which have been tried and found to be effective in various parts of New Zealand.
- 2.2 Common interest and general support networking
- 2.2.1 Sharing ideas on student codes of conduct.
 - 2.2.2 Sharing ideas on evangelisation and faith promotion.
 - 2.2.3 Sharing ideas on parent support.
 - 2.2.4 Sharing ideas on social justice initiatives.
 - 2.2.5 Sharing ideas on good practice in education.
 - 2.2.6 Sharing resources.
- 2.3 Strengthening the link between primary and secondary schools.
- 2.3.1 Primary schools encourage secondary principals, staff and students (particularly former pupils) to visit their contributing primary schools, to give primary pupils an insight into secondary school life.
 - 2.3.2 Secondary schools invite and encourage primary school pupils to come and visit, not just on open day but to share other aspects of school life such as assemblies, performances and sports.
 - 2.3.3 Secondary school principals report to primary school principals on the progress of the pupils who have recently moved from each contributing primary school to the secondary school – formally or informally, by a note, phone call or visit.
 - 2.3.4 Primary school staff welcome secondary staff or students into their school to talk about enrolling in the secondary school, and encourage (or even escort) primary pupils to the secondary school's open day.
 - 2.3.5 Senior secondary Physical Education students teach Kiwi Sports to groups from contributing primary schools.
 - 2.3.6 Primary and secondary school principals send copies of their school newsletters to each other.

- 2.4.1 Catholic principals set up local or regional networks, involving both primary and secondary schools, to enhance their profile, and to plan joint publicity.
 - 2.4.2 Catholic schools co-operate to jointly advertise information about open days, start of school year and so on in their local newspaper.
 - 2.4.3 Principals initiate joint strategies for promoting Catholic schooling within Catholic parishes.
- 2.4 Further practices which may be worth considering, and which may already be in operation in some regions
- 2.4.1 Partnership planning for professional development.
 - 2.4.2 Teacher exchanges.
 - 2.4.3 Joint planning for staff recruitment.
 - 2.4.4 Helping any school in particular difficulties.
 - 2.4.5 Joint purchase of resources.
 - 2.4.6 Joint responses to Government education initiatives.
 - 2.4.7 Partnership arrangements to deal with difficult and challenging pupils

3.0 Further Ideas

- 3.1 School Principals who are engaged in other networking strategies may wish to make their ideas available for others to share, either through Catholic Principals' meetings, or through the publications of the New Zealand Catholic Education Office.

CONCLUSION

- Individual schools, by working together, can do much to promote the health of the whole Catholic school system, to promote Catholic values, and to ensure the continuing viability of our schools.
- Such co-operative action is a practical example of Christian democracy in action, and therefore contributes to the advancement of the common good of the whole society.
- This document has drawn on information and comments from the Catholic primary and secondary school networks, and also from *Catholic Schools and the Common Good: What this Means in Educational Practice*, by Gerald Grace, 2000 (Institute of Education, University of London).

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