

New school openings

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Momentum & milestones: 2024 in review

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Bishop Thinh on a journey of faith, family and gratitude

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Melbourne Archdiocese
Catholic Schools

School and Parish

UPDATE TERM 2 – 2025

Calm in the classroom

What kind of learning environments do students need, to thrive?



The answer is clear. To thrive, students need classrooms where calm is the norm; where respectful behaviour is not assumed, but explicitly taught; where routines are consistent, expectations are shared, and every student feels safe, seen and supported.

Students need teachers who are focused on teaching – who are supported with the best possible learning, resources and policies that enable them to focus on what they do best.

That's why we've launched the MACS *Vision for Engagement* – our faith-inspired and evidence-informed system-wide commitment to nurturing calm, respectful, and inclusive learning

environments where students are best supported to thrive academically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

Developed as a companion to MACS' *Vision for Instruction*, it represents another leap towards delivering the Flourishing Learners ambition set out in the MACS 2030 strategy.

Firmly anchored in our Catholic faith and guided by contemporary educational research, *Vision for Engagement* focuses on upholding the dignity of every child in our care and reflects our enduring dedication to 'forming lives to enrich the world'.

MACS' twin 'vision' statements represent a holistic and uniquely

Catholic response to the unprecedented challenges young people face today. *Vision for Engagement* will see explicit teaching of respectful student behaviour elevated to a core developmental focus across MACS' almost-300 primary and secondary schools.

Speaking on ABC Radio, MACS Executive Director Dr Edward Simons said Australian classrooms are among the most disorderly in OECD PISA results. 'Making these changes is not optional', he said.



Fr Mark Reynolds EV
Episcopal Vicar for
Catholic Schools

MACS recently launched a new position statement entitled *Vision for Engagement*. It follows on from the launch last year of *Vision for Instruction*, which has been widely welcomed and celebrated as a game changer for students. In many ways, the latest 'vision' acknowledges the reality that, for instruction to be effective, those being instructed need to be engaged in the learning. Yet, the reality is that there are many challenges and obstacles to student engagement, and seeking to address them can also prove to be a game changer.

The same is true with faith formation. Teachers, parents, principals and clergy all want the best possible faith formation for their children and students in their schools, and there are many challenges in this that were not so great an issue when I was ordained in 1979. It's easy to lament, to pine, perhaps, for the presumed 'good old days; but little is ever served by getting ready for yesterday.

In a classroom or a class Mass of 25 children, there are many stages of faith formation and, in a church of 300, the situation is multiplied. The challenge for priests, at times daunting, is to work with this complexity. It really is a key time for priests, teachers and religious education leaders to 'work together in mission'. I certainly know that teachers have insights and skills that I don't have, and I'm happy to learn from 'the experts' so that the experience of liturgy in particular can be something that speaks to those present while of course never losing the sacredness and significance of what is being celebrated.

In his foreword to *Vision for Engagement*, Archbishop Peter states: (continued on page 5)



For students at MACS schools, our *Vision for Engagement* means:

✓ behaving respectfully
towards others

✓ attending school
every day, on time

✓ adopting classroom
routines that ensure
everyone understands
expectations

✓ listening intently
and paying attention

✓ participating in instruction
that is targeted to need,
and supports growth
and achievement

✓ persisting with complex
tasks

✓ feeling safe and
belonging at school

✓ being supported with
mental health and
wellbeing

✓ benefiting from stronger
partnerships between school
and family

✓ experiencing caring
relationships with teachers
and school staff

✓ receiving a coordinated and effective
system of increasingly intensive tiered
interventions and supports across all
areas of their learning

What it does not mean:

✗ having only one mode of
work, such as group work
or silent work

✗ substituting challenging
work for easy tasks

✗ using technology, videos
or games in every lesson

✗ teaching just the topics
students are interested in or
care about

✗ being physically active in
every lesson



Celebrating our shared success

The collective achievements of MACS during a year of progress and momentum have been celebrated with the launch last month of the MACS 2024 Annual Report.

Over 50 guests from across Melbourne joined Archbishop Peter A Comensoli, MACS Board Chair Gerard Dalbosco and Executive Director Dr Edward Simons, along with representatives from the National Catholic Education Commission, Catholic Development Fund, Department of Education, MPs and other stakeholders at Catholic Leadership Centre, acknowledging the bold steps taken in 2024 to shape a dynamic education system that supports every child to learn, grow and thrive.

Dr Edward Simons offered heartfelt thanks to the many colleagues whose quiet, consistent contributions form the backbone of our organisation. As we reflect on the steps taken, we honour all those whose dedication continues to shape the lives of students and communities across the Archdiocese.

A copy of the MACS 2024 Annual Report has been sent to each parish. You are encouraged to share the report with your parish communities, so families across Melbourne can celebrate the remarkable achievements of our students, teachers and schools.

[Read the Annual Report here.](#)



As our teachers, students and communities come to the end of another school term and its renewal during the Easter period, we reflect on the passing of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, and give thanks for his inspiring legacy. There is also much to celebrate as we welcome Pope Leo XIV as the new head of the Church and the solidarity he brings with his election.

Earlier in the term, our Principals Forum progressed the vital work of leading and improving our schools. I thank all principals for sharing their insights and experiences – I am grateful for all the work they do in leading our schools.

We continue on our path towards our MACS 2030 ambitions, including to become the employer of choice in education, with our inaugural Wellbeing Summit held in Week 6. The unique Teachers as Co-Learners (TCL) initiative distinguishes Catholic education by offering students and teachers opportunities to flourish, positioning the Catholic sector at the forefront of educational innovation and excellence.

Similarly, the launch of our *Vision for Engagement* in Week 8 is another major step towards our MACS 2030 vision. The culmination of years of



Dr Edward Simons
Executive Director

global research, our roadmap for supporting students to become resilient, confident learners is a key element in our Flourishing Learners strategic pillar.

Australian Catholic Youth Festival

Registrations are now open for the Australian Catholic Youth Festival (ACYF) and we look forward to seeing our secondary school students join this inspiring celebration. Involvement across the spectrum of MACS school communities is welcome and, as an expression of the solidarity that is at the heart of our work, we look forward to bringing together as large a gathering from our Archdiocese as we can for what is a key national event in this Jubilee year.

In terms of solidarity, a team of MACS colleagues and I participated in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout again in June, raising funds for those who are sleeping rough.

Solidarity, in times of challenge – the passing of our former colleague Michelle Moore; in times of celebration – the Corpus Christi Procession; in times when those around us are doing it so tough; is a hallmark of our faith that can enrich the world.

Building for mission in Term 2

This term, Catholic school communities across the Archdiocese have celebrated new milestones in the ongoing transformation of our learning environments – milestones that reflect the momentum of MACS 2030 in action.

Each project is a sign of our system-wide investment in faith-filled, contemporary spaces where every student is supported to flourish.

Among the highlights, construction has commenced on several new school sites designed to serve Melbourne's fastest growing corridors, including the new St Marianne Cope

Catholic Parish Primary School at Mount Atkinson – a \$17.1 million development integrating early years and primary education on one site, supported by significant state government funding. When it opens in 2026, it will provide a seamless educational pathway for families across Rockbank, Aintree, Deanside and surrounds.

Established schools are also renewing for the future. In May, Sacred Heart School in Sandringham officially opened its newly upgraded facilities, including general learning areas, a STEM space and improved accessibility. The \$5.25 million upgrade, made possible through



Image: St Marianne Cope sod-turning

Victorian Government and Catholic Development Fund support, ensures the school continues to deliver inclusive, future-focused learning grounded in Catholic identity.

Meanwhile, works are underway at Thornhill Park on the future St Padre Pio Catholic Primary School – another 2026 opening

designed through the *Faith Follows Form* framework.

Altogether, MACS has helped celebrate and bless 18 school and building openings in 2025 – representing more than \$150 million in infrastructure investment to support mission, growth and the flourishing of every learner across our system.



Bishop Thinh returns to former parish school to mark the end of the Vietnam War

A journey of faith, family and gratitude

Marking 50 years since the fall of Saigon, Bishop Thinh Nguyen recently returned to Sacred Heart School in Fitzroy – a place he once served as parish priest and still holds close to his heart.

Recounting his memories of the conflict that eventually brought him and his 12 siblings to Melbourne when he was just 13 years old, Bishop Thinh told students and their parents how he and his family arrived in Melbourne with nothing. 'But the people of Australia welcomed us with open arms', he said. It would take five long years before the whole family were reunited.

The Bishop vividly recalled his childhood in war-torn Vietnam,

remembering hearing nearby bombing and his parents telling him to run to the neighbour's house to hide.

'It was very scary', he said. 'But thank God we were safe. Somehow, I was protected, and that's the faith I grew up with.'

The reunion with his older siblings in Australia after years of separation was a moment of deep emotion. 'My parents cried tears of joy and this was the most powerful experience for me.'

There were moving scenes among adults in the chapel, for whom the Bishop's story prompted memories of their own journey to Australia.

Bishop Thinh told them that

his deep faith and gratitude are grounded in the sacrifices his devout Catholic parents made. 'They sacrificed their own comfort, and they worked very hard to bring us to Australia', he said. 'They spent all their money to send their children to Australia, hopefully for us to have a brighter future.'

Bishop Thinh received his calling to the priesthood at the age of 26 and says his pastoral vision was deeply shaped by Pope Francis, who he described as 'the one who inspires me to be who I am, to care for the poor and the earth'.

He reminded students how fortunate we are to live in Australia.

'We live in harmony. This is an

opportunity to come together, to celebrate love, care and the welcome this country gave to us.'

Earlier this year, Bishop Thinh was consecrated at St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne, but his return to Sacred Heart School was a humble reminder of his past – of faith, family and resilience.

His final message: 'War is never the solution. Let us act with peace and love.'

The war ended on 30 April, 1975.



Bishop Thinh's siblings



Bishop Thinh Nguyen, speaking to students at Sacred Heart School in Fitzroy



Open Days Open Doors: an invitation to consider Catholic education

Over the last term, MACS has been actively inviting families across our city to experience an open day at one of MACS' almost-300 schools. The digital advertising campaign invites Catholic and Christian families with children up to 12 years of age to see firsthand the rich, faith-filled environment where their children will flourish.

Launched in early March and running through to August, the campaign extends the hand of the Church to families from all walks of life, helping them to understand the value and impact of Catholic education.

A coordinated strategy with impact

Through a combination of radio ads and digital campaigns across Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, we brought the message to Melbourne households: Catholic schools offer safe and caring communities, small class sizes and confidence-building programs, and celebrate children from all walks of life. These are the qualities and values that matter most to families, and are the pillars of our schools.

In March alone, visits to the Open Days Open Doors website landing page exceeded 14,500. Social media ads drove more than 13,000 of these visits, while radio alone delivered a 74% uplift in website visits to Find My Catholic School. And most importantly, we saw over 6,200 enquiries across our schools.

The campaign invites families to

see for themselves the difference a Catholic school can make. It reminded us all that, beyond results and rankings, Catholic education is about formation, belonging and community. A number of schools saw dramatic spikes in interest, including St Andrew's School, Werribee (+327%) and St Lawrence of Brindisi Catholic Primary School, Weir Views (+186%), underscoring the power of meaningful engagement.

The role of our parishes

As parish priests, your presence at the heart of school and parish life is critical. Your support through bulletins, school visits and conversations with families helps bring this invitation to life. You may already be seeing new families at school Masses, sparked by these very efforts.

We encourage you to continue promoting your local school's open day, not just as an enrolment event, but as a pastoral opportunity to welcome and accompany families. These moments of encounter can plant seeds that bear spiritual fruit.

The campaign continues until late August.

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'When we know how to recognise the voice of God, we discover the joy and beauty of being in relationship with the Creator of the universe.'

Some students before us have little concept of God, but therein lies something to be gently developed. When priests in particular are able to engage

in this reality, the impact can be significant and at times powerful. The Australian Education Research Organisation has said that students need to have a positive sense of belonging to sustain their attention in school, which helps them process and retain new knowledge more effectively. The same is true for the celebration of liturgy. Evangelisation has many opportunities and sometimes we can be surprised by them.

Our ambition for specialist schools

A key initiative of the MACS 2030 strategic plan is to enhance our education offering for students with disabilities.

Archbishop Peter is deeply committed to supporting the most vulnerable in our community. He has encouraged MACS to be 'bold and ambitious', and better serve all young people with more inclusive education.

MACS currently supports over 28,000 students with disability (around 25% of all enrolments); however, a significantly lower proportion of students in Catholic schools (0.5%) are enrolled in specialist schools, compared with 2.2% in government schools and 2.1% in independent schools. This disparity highlights a gap in provision and suggests that Catholic schools may not

currently be meeting demand for specialist education on a per capita basis.

To address this disparity, we're working on a strategic direction for MACS specialist schools. Our 10-year aspiration is to align with global leading practice and ensure increased support, choice and quality education for all young people.

We want MACS to be the faith-driven, educator of choice for Catholic families and carers, where students of all abilities learn and have a pathway towards a future that unlocks their potential.



CMI operating model changes

Since the change in governance for schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, we find ourselves in a different context, requiring us to progress towards a stronger evangelisation model for our work. This has been the driver for the change in operating model.

Our goal is to support our schools more effectively in living out our shared Catholic mission and identity, and support the schools in faith formation, Religious Education (RE) excellence, school and parish engagement, and faith leadership.

The Catholic Mission and Identity (CMI) team's purpose is to enable the evangelising mission for all schools, aligning with the MACS 2030 purpose: forming lives of faith, hope and love in the light of Jesus Christ.

CMI facilitates rich, deep and varied learning experiences that empower the faith formation of principals and senior leaders, teachers, staff, students and families, and MACS board and executive leaders in the MACS mission; enabling Christian discipleship in each Catholic school community; inspiring and

developing faith leadership; and providing quality resourcing for excellence in RE. CMI partners with other directorates to ensure that projects, policies and procedures are imbued with our Catholic mission. CMI is available for project collaboration, policy development, learning and outreach support in pastoral care and complex issues, communicating our faith confidently and building relationships with partners in the broader Catholic environment.

CMI builds healthy working relationships with the Archdiocese to model, 'Working Together in

Mission' (WTIM), helping parish/school partnerships to flourish, and connects school-based needs in mission and identity with resources, advice and direction, and external partners in evangelisation and faith formation.

By 2030, we aim to become a system of schools where students and staff grow in virtue, supported by an outstanding RE curriculum that is executed with impact, in an environment that enables faith to flourish.

A significant shift in our operating model.

Our new operating model will see a big shift for us and our stakeholders

FROM

TO

A direct school-facing model with limitations of time and resources, and lack of school equity

A model of high-quality resourcing that is faith-filled, theologically informed, Christ-centred and equitable across system

A model of weighted RE experience dependent on staff availability

A new model of mission partnership exercised through regional networks and leadership

A response-to-need approach to working with our schools

A proactive and measurable impact of best practice in Catholic modelling and witness for school communities

A model of occasional and uneven parish engagement

A model of WTIM embedded in each parish and school

RE curriculum update

MACS has been supporting the implementation of the recommendations of the *Review of the Religious Education Curriculum for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* through writing, resourcing, and project management of a new RE curriculum.

The Religious Education Reference Group, set up by the Archbishop of Melbourne, is implementing the recommendations of the Review of the Religious Education Curriculum.

You can follow monthly updates here: <https://resource-macs.com/new-re-curriculum/>.