

Catholic Schools NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Conference

It was my great privilege last Thursday to attend and present at this conference to an audience which included members of our Year 10 Immersion partner schools in St Joseph's Walgett in Aunty Fay Green and Hannah Pedersen (whose brothers attended St Pius), and St Mary's Bowraville, as well as respected journalist Jeff McMullen, and members of the wider Catholic Schools NSW Community.

The Theme Focus: *Community engagement and cultural connections within the school environment* provided opportunity to present St Pius X College's journey in developing links to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Culture, History and Spirituality, to the benefit of its students and community.

In the presentation it was noted:

St Pius X College Chatswood is proudly a Catholic Boy's School in the tradition of Edmund Rice Education. Being an inner northern Sydney suburban school, with a strong academic and sporting tradition, St Pius has had relatively few students who "identify" as having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage in recent years.

As such the College's students, staff and community have made a conscious effort to embrace and enhance connectedness and a sense of pride in Aboriginal heritage, people and connection to the country on which we live and thrive, with great respect to the traditional custodians of the land for over 60,000 years.

These ideals are supported through the development of Reconciliation Action Plans at both an Edmund Rice Education Australia network, school, class and community level, in keeping with the EREA Touchstones: Justice and Solidarity, Inclusive Community, Liberating Education and Gospel Spirituality.

Links have been established to Aboriginal and Torres Strait role models within our society, school and network including Kaleb Taylor, school liaison officer at Christian Brothers High School Lewisham, who has generously mentored and guided our students.

The College has annually celebrated themed and participated Reconciliation Assemblies, complemented by significant symbols and commemorative plaques, statements and artwork which acknowledges and celebrates the richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and spirituality along with the need to embrace reconciliation actions.

Some basic understanding the principles of Aboriginal Spirituality and belief systems are incorporated in our pastoral care programs through such things as the inclusion of the teachings of Stuart McMinn in our Year 9 Rites of Passage camp to enhance the concepts of developing Respectful Men of Honour under the Gospel theme: "go and do likewise" Luke 10-25.

The College has commissioned a work of Reconciliation Art by Sean Ryan incorporating the touchstones, colours, themes and traditional flora and themes of the College location, situation and history harmonised with the symbols and style of Sean's artistic style and charisma.

Students and staff proudly wear Reconciliation sports jerseys and singlets to "start the conversation" as ambassadors for reconciliation on sports and cultural tours both within NSW, interstate and abroad. Students and staff of the College travel annually to visit communities and schools in Walgett, Coonabarabran and Bowraville to share story and experiences and reciprocate when we host groups at our College Campus at Chatswood and Oxford Falls.

In July 2019 a group of 40 Year 9-11 students and 10 staff from St Pius travelled to Coonabarabran, the Warrumbungles, Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke and Dubbo to be guided through the Sandstone Caves by Kamilaroi NPWS Officer Jill Norton, visit reconciliation artwork: Sculptures in the Scrub, Dandry Gorge in the Pilliga Scrub, Baradine NPWS Discovery Centre and Local Area Land Council. They visited St Lawrence's Coonabarabran, St Joseph's Walgett and St Ignatius', Bourke to participate in sports days at each school as well as visit the Brewarrina Fish Traps, Aboriginal Cultural Museum Centre and Taronga Western Plains zoo.

The students involved hope to return to the College as ambassadors for reconciliation, representatives on our RAP team, and would like to honestly present their observations and hopes. Through these and a range of other actions and initiatives the College seeks to develop links to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers:

2.4.2 Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

1.3.2 Design and implement teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

1.4.2 Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

4.1.2 Establish and implement inclusive and positive interactions to engage and support all students in classroom activities.

7.3.2 Establish and maintain respectful collaborative relationships with parents/ carers regarding their children's learning and wellbeing.

7.4.3 Contribute to professional networks and associations and build productive links with the wider community to improve teaching and learning.

Thanks go to our Reconciliation Action Plan Committee including staff: Mr Ryan Balboa, Mr Nathan Mulheron, Ms Jenny Williams, Mr Adrian Brannan, Mr Phil Stollery, Mr James Quinn, Ms Bettina Spanyik, Mr Tim Long and Mr Fernando Mendez as well as students: Ash Johnson and Connor Ryan (Year 10) and Caleb Hanrahan and Cavan Ryan (Year 9) who provide student voice on our RAP Team.

The administration staff and particularly Ms Roslyn Gaston were instrumental in providing a presentation that was very well received and did much to contribute to the reputation of our College as an educational centre striving to acknowledge the importance and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to our shared history and culture.

*Mr Sean Brannan
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