

FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER

HOW PARENTS CAN WORK WITH SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND WELLBEING

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS WITH STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



COUNCIL OF
**CATHOLIC
SCHOOL
PARENTS**
NSW/ACT

LEADERSHIP | ADVOCACY | SUPPORT

PARENTS' PRAYER

Loving God, bless our children with wisdom, focus and confidence at school.

May those of us who are privileged to help them grow guide their mind to learn with joy, their heart to grow in kindness, and their spirit to stay strong.

Walking together, may we ensure their efforts are fruitful, their friendships uplifting, and their future filled with hope and grace.

Amen.

Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*), #3

Vatican Council II, 1965

'Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognised as the primary and principal educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs.'

Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration

'Learning is a partnership with parents, carers and others in the community, all of whom have a role to play in nurturing the love of learning needed for success at school and in life.'

FOREWORD

Dear Parents,

You have given life to your children and cared for them from the very beginning. Especially in their early years, you are their 'universe' and you cannot help but love them.

All this has happened in the loving Providence of God, so the Church has constantly taught that parents are the first teachers of their children. Catholic schools exist only to assist parents, so it is essential that if your child is to have the best education possible, you and your school work well together.

This guide has been prepared by the Council of Catholic School Parents to give you ideas and tips on how you might work best with your child's school. There are suggestions on how to maintain good relations with your school and communicate in the most effective way. There are ideas about how to support your child's learning at school: volunteering and attending parent-teacher interviews. There are also ideas about how to support your child's learning at home.

Remember also the importance of showing your children that you are interested in their studies. Give them your time and love. Encourage them and show you are supportive of their teachers. Form a community with the school and get involved in the local parish and community. Feeling supported on all sides and part of a wide, loving community, your child will thrive.

Please read this guide attentively and see if you can put its suggestions into practice.

Bishop Danny Meagher
Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney



CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Why Schools Want to Engage Parents	6
Respectful Relationships and Communication	8
Contributing to the Culture and Community of the Catholic School	10
Supporting Learning at School	12
Loving Learning at Home	16
Joining the School Parent Group	22
Resources and References	26



INTRODUCTION

This guide is all about how you can help your child do well at school. All parents want their children to do well at school and become good, wise and kind citizens who make informed decisions and are caring leaders in the community.

We send our children to Catholic schools to learn, grow and socialise, and to recognise their dignity and the dignity of others as people created in the image of God. In Catholic schools, great emphasis is placed on building relationships modelled on the teachings of Jesus: love, peace, justice, service, compassion and reaching out to others with a kind and loving heart.

‘Parent engagement’ or ‘family engagement’ refers to how schools and parents work together to ensure parents are essential parts of the school’s community and partners in children’s learning and wellbeing. We know from many years of research that when families engage effectively with schools, students

- ▶ attend school more regularly
- ▶ perform better academically
- ▶ have improved social skills
- ▶ show increased motivation and confidence.

Catholic schools want to work with families to make a school the best environment for students, contributing positively to their learning and wellbeing. When families are embedded in the fabric of school life, students do better and feel better.

What we mean by ‘parent’: In this guide, we use the term ‘parent’ to mean any family member, carer, guardian, kinship carer or other adult who acts as a parent to a child and has the role of educating and caregiving. Sometimes we use ‘family’, and by this we mean all the different types of families out there and all the immediate and extended family members involved in children’s lives.

WHO YOU ARE

We presume you are a parent with a child in a Catholic school who wants your child to thrive at school and who wants to know what you can do to support their academic outcomes and wellbeing.

The Catholic Church recognises you as your child’s first and most influential educator. Teachers and schools also acknowledge you as the most important educator of your child; you have been educating your child since birth, and you know them best. Your role is not separate from the school’s mission – schools need you so they can do the very best for your child.

WHO WE ARE

The Council of Catholic Schools Parents NSW is the state peak body for parents with children in Catholic schools. We advocate for Catholic school families at a state level and provide support and resources for schools and families. Find out about us here: ccsp.catholic.edu.au.

WHY THIS GUIDE

There are many frameworks and tools and documents that schools use to meet their requirements to engage families, but we wanted to write a guide for parents that is easy to read and follow. Yes, the principal and staff lead the parent engagement plan of the school, and your diocese and school will have policies about how parent engagement looks in your school, but parents can also take an active part in building collaborative partnerships and learning about what they can do for their children and school.

Parents matter, and when they work together with school leaders and staff to create a collaborative, inclusive culture focused on learning, the whole school community benefits.

‘Let all that you do be done in love.’ – 1 Corinthians 16:14



WHY SCHOOLS WANT TO ENGAGE PARENTS

Schools seek ways to build strong connections with families and the wider community to enhance student learning, engagement, wellbeing and opportunity.

'Engagement' is built on mutual respect, shared goals and consistent communication. In Catholic schools, it also includes shared faith formation, participation in sacramental life and the building of a Christ-centred learning community.

RELATIONSHIPS, INVOLVEMENT, ENGAGEMENT, PARTNERSHIP

'Parent involvement' in the school often refers to parents taking up opportunities at the school, such as volunteering to help with the canteen, uniform shop or fundraising events. 'Parent engagement', known also as 'family engagement', begins with building respectful relationships between the school staff, parents and students.

'Parent engagement in learning' can be at school, and includes helping with classroom reading, attending assemblies, talking to teachers about students' learning or challenges and attending parent learning opportunities.

'Parent engagement in learning at home', with a connection to what students are learning at school and partnering with teachers, is how parents can really make a difference, and includes

- ▶ having high but reasonable expectations of achievement
- ▶ reading with their child
- ▶ talking positively about school
- ▶ having open conversations about learning and relationships
- ▶ providing space and opportunity for homework and study.

Parent groups such as P&F Associations and other parent bodies give parents the opportunity to partner with the principal, collaborate on projects, be consultants and contribute to school decision-making and strategic planning for school improvement. Because schools know that parent engagement in learning improves student outcomes, parent group meetings now often have an educative component to upskill parents and focus on students' learning journeys.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Catholic schools prioritise parent engagement because of Canon (Church) law:

Canon 796. §2 There must be the closest cooperation between parents and the teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated. In fulfilling their task, teachers are to collaborate closely with the parents and willingly listen to them; associations and meetings of parents are to be set up and held in high esteem.

Schools in NSW also need to engage parents in alignment with professional standards, frameworks, and other federal and state government guiding documents (see the References and Resources for a list of these).

CHALLENGES FOR PARENTS

Since Covid, it's been harder for schools to connect with parents and develop partnerships, although technology has been useful. At the same time, educators in Australia are emphasising just how important it is that parents are engaged effectively in their children's learning. Ironically, parents are busier than ever, just when schools want them back on board, and many find it challenging to find time to attend school events or help with homework.

Most parents work and school hours are during work hours, which makes it difficult to talk to teachers. Other barriers for parents to be engaged include caring for other children or family members, language barriers, cultural differences, parking, transport, negative memories of their own schooling, and feeling judged by staff or other parents for their family situation or parenting.

Schools understand just how hard it is for some parents to get to school events, attend parent-teacher interviews, or have time to attend parent group meetings.

We don't have the answers either! But we do know that parents need to know that they matter, that schools want to partner with them, and that there are things they can do at school and at home to help their child do well at school.

'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.'

- Galatians 6:9

THE BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE PARENT ENGAGEMENT

BENEFITS FOR SCHOOLS

- ▶ **Improved student outcomes** - students achieve higher academic results and show stronger motivation when parents are engaged.
- ▶ **Stronger school community** - builds trust, respect and a sense of belonging between staff, students, and families.
- ▶ **Better communication** - increases clarity and reduces misunderstandings between home and school.
- ▶ **Enhanced support for teachers** - teachers benefit from parents reinforcing learning at home and supporting classroom initiatives.
- ▶ **Positive school reputation** - engaged parents advocate for the school, attracting enrolments and strengthening community partnerships.

BENEFITS FOR FAMILIES

- ▶ **Greater understanding of learning** - parents gain insight into what and how their children are learning.
- ▶ **Stronger parent-child relationships** - shared involvement in learning fosters closer family bonds.
- ▶ **Empowerment and confidence** - parents feel more capable in supporting their child's education.
- ▶ **Early intervention** - families can identify and address challenges sooner with school collaboration.
- ▶ **Increased wellbeing** - engagement reduces stress and isolation, helping parents feel part of a supportive community.

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

Catholic schools are respectful relationship communities with a focus on learning. Relationships are the foundation of successful parent engagement and parents have a powerful influence on the culture of respect in schools.

Schools are never places for hostility, aggression or violence. Teachers and school leaders deserve to have workplaces that are safe and where they are respected in their roles, and parents deserve to be spoken to as equals with honesty and respect. Teachers and parents are partners in children's education.

RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS

The way you speak to your child about school and its community members is an important opportunity to model courtesy and positive social behaviour:

- ▶ Talk respectfully to students, staff, principal and other parents.
- ▶ Talk respectfully about students, staff, principal and other parents to your child.
- ▶ Talk respectfully about school policies and support codes of conduct and school processes.

DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS

The way you interact with other school community members shows your child how to build relationships and belong to a community:

- ▶ See school staff and leaders as people first and staff second.
- ▶ Make sure teachers and the school know how best to contact you.
- ▶ Listen attentively - to your children, to teachers and other families.
- ▶ Share information about your child with teachers - your hopes for them, their

passions, how they learn best.

- ▶ Give feedback when asked about what works for your family and what doesn't.
- ▶ Attend events and connect with other parents.
- ▶ Celebrate your child's - and other children's - achievements with the school.

COMMUNICATING CONSISTENTLY AND CLEARLY

Parents can help develop relationships with the school community by staying informed and being proactive in their communication with teachers and the office. Remember that strong, respectful dialogue between home and school supports everyone's wellbeing:

- ▶ Read school communications such as calendars on websites, apps and newsletters to keep informed about what's happening at the school. Let the school know if you or your child are having problems receiving information or understanding communications from the school.
- ▶ If the school asks for feedback, sends surveys, or asks you to provide comments on school life or decisions, try to make

time to communicate your thoughts and feelings – they really do want to know!

- ▶ Let the school know why you can't make it to events, do homework or attend meetings – what's stopping your family from engaging?
- ▶ Ensure you use the school's social media accounts appropriately and respectfully.
- ▶ Initiate regular communication with teachers and school staff through the appropriate channels like emails, phone calls or parent-teacher meetings.
- ▶ Make yourself available and approachable for conversations with school staff. Show that you are a partner in your child's education.

RAISING CONCERNS CONSTRUCTIVELY

Sometimes parents need to raise concerns about their children's schooling. If you have a problem, ask for help. This can be difficult, but it is important to discuss any problems or concerns with the school.

- ▶ If you would like to use an interpreter to help you talk to the school, the primary interpreting service for parents who need to communicate in a language other than English is the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National), which can be reached by calling 131 450. This service is free for parents and can connect them with an interpreter who will stay on the line to facilitate the conversation with the school. Talk to either your child's teacher or the English as an Additional Language/ Dialect (EAL/D) teacher if one is available.
- ▶ You, or the school, may decide to involve the year coordinator, senior teacher, deputy principal or principal to help as well, depending on the type of problem.
- ▶ You can contact the school counsellor for help at any time. Their contact information will be available from the school's front office or website or newsletter.

Schools and dioceses have a complaints process – check the diocese's or school's website and look for a link to a complaints and grievances policy or form.

Usually, the best person to raise any problems you may have with the learning program or your child's wellbeing is with their classroom or subject teacher. Teachers at the school want to help. Always remember the shared goal: supporting your child's learning and wellbeing:

1. **Request a suitable time to meet with the teacher:** Don't raise concerns at the classroom door or during busy times. Ask for a meeting (in person, phone, or online) through the school office or email.
2. **Be clear and specific:** Outline the issue calmly and factually, use examples (dates, homework tasks, incidents) rather than general statements, and focus on your child's experience, not comparing with other families.
3. **Listen to the teacher's perspective:** Teachers may provide context you were unaware of (classroom dynamics, school policies). Make sure you listen and allow the teacher to respond fully before moving to solutions.
4. **Work towards solutions together:** What outcome would help your child? Be open to the teacher's strategies and expertise and agree on next steps and a timeframe for review.
5. **Escalate if needed:** If your concern can't be resolved at the school level, by a teacher or the assistant principal or principal, you may be directed to contact a team at the Catholic schools office, who will help you address the problem and resolve it internally or with help from a dispute resolution process.

'Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.'

– Ephesians 4:32



CONTRIBUTING TO THE CULTURE AND COMMUNITY OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

All families are welcome at Catholic schools - families are fundamental to the school community and schools want a family-friendly atmosphere. Families are crucial to the mission and success of Catholic schools.

Catholic schools aim to cultivate a strong spiritual life and a relationship with God. When families actively participate in their children's faith journey, it strengthens the school's efforts to foster a living, vibrant faith community.

The values taught in Catholic schools - such as compassion, respect, service and integrity - are most effective when supported by family life. Parents who model these virtues at home provide consistency that helps children internalise them, creating a holistic environment where faith and morals are lived daily.

When families are active in Catholic school life, children see learning as a lifelong journey, not just a part of school. Parents become role models of faith, service and resilience, inspiring children to live out their beliefs beyond the classroom.

ADVOCATING FOR THE COMMON GOOD, TOGETHER

Catholic education promotes the dignity of every human person and calls for justice in society. You can support this vision, teaching children to think beyond themselves and contribute to a better world. Be a part of the school's efforts to create fair, ethical and sustainable communities:

- ▶ Discuss real-world issues with children in an age-appropriate, hope-filled way.
- ▶ Participate in fundraising, social justice campaigns and advocacy events.
- ▶ Help children make ethical choices and take responsibility for their actions.
- ▶ Encourage gratitude, generosity and environmental responsibility.
- ▶ Support school policies that promote the wellbeing of all children and families.

Children who see adults acting for justice and compassion are more likely to become active, empathetic citizens.

'Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.' – Matthew 5:16

CREATING BELONGING

You can help to create a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment by having positive interactions with other parents, staff, students and the principal whenever you're at school:

- ▶ Welcome new families who look like they need a smiling face.
- ▶ Model kindness; set a good example for your child.
- ▶ Attend assemblies, liturgies and celebrations when possible.
- ▶ Value the diversity of families and respect their diverse faith journeys.
- ▶ Build connections where you can – with other families, and across the parish and local community; look for ways to include others.
- ▶ Volunteer your time or talents where possible (e.g. class help, P&F, events).
- ▶ Support school initiatives that build inclusivity and welcome.
- ▶ Encourage other parents and reach out to those who may feel isolated.
- ▶ Participate in community service and outreach initiatives with their children.

A welcoming and connected school community strengthens everyone's sense of belonging. This is especially important in Catholic schools, which aim to be places of love, justice and hospitality.

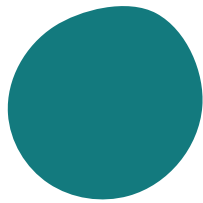


SUPPORTING LEARNING AT SCHOOL

School-based activities for parents to be involved in their children's learning include communicating with teachers, attending meetings about your child, volunteering in the classroom or attending school parent group meetings. These are all opportunities initiated and led by the school.

GETTING INVOLVED TO ASSIST LEARNING AND WELLBEING

- ▶ Make attendance at school a focus for the school week to show your child that you value their schooling.
- ▶ Ensure your child knows you are working with the school; this gives them a sense of belonging and helps them understand that their education is important.
- ▶ Aim for positive interactions with teachers about children's learning, sharing knowledge, ideas and concerns.
- ▶ When you can, accept school invitations to attend class-based activities to see and hear about what your child is learning at school and build relationships with teachers and other parents.
- ▶ If the school offers a transition program (to Kindergarten or Year 7) attend these events when you can, with or without your child, and ask questions about the school's resources and opportunities for students.
- ▶ Attend welcome ceremonies, graduations, assemblies, liturgies and parent learning workshops at the school's invitation.
- ▶ Join the school parent group; this is a way parents can contribute to shaping school policies and initiatives and come together to build the capacity of families and parent leaders. In these groups parents can learn new skills and also share their expertise or knowledge that could benefit the school and the broader community.



UNDERSTANDING CURRICULUM

Having a basic understanding of what schools teach will help you be more engaged in your child's learning. Curriculum outlines what students should know and be able to do at each grade level and subject area. It also helps ensure that all children receive a high-quality and consistent education.

Curriculum includes all the activities that happen in the school calendar.

In NSW, the NSW Education Standards Authority, or NESA, delivers curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 12. NESA has recently completed a comprehensive revision of all syllabuses. The new NSW Curriculum reforms focus on emphasising essential knowledge and skills, especially for early years literacy and numeracy, and providing clearer pathways to post-school options.

You can find NESA parent guide on specific subjects here: <https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/resources/teaching-resources?q=parent>

The NSW Curriculum is structured in Primary and Secondary **Stages**. Students move through the stages of learning.

VOLUNTEERING AND SAFEGUARDING IN SCHOOLS

Volunteering opportunities at school for parents include joining classes on excursions, helping with classroom reading, doing canteen duty and helping out at sports carnivals. All of these activities that include parent contribution help to build community and support children's learning.

Each Catholic diocese and school has specific policies and procedures for volunteers and child safeguarding including volunteer registration processes, induction, training, registration forms and registers of volunteers to ensure compliance. Check with your school to see what you need to do.

Volunteering in NSW Catholic schools requires adherence to the Working with Children Check (WWCC) policy and child safeguarding training, with most volunteers needing a WWCC clearance for child-related roles, even if the role is brief. Parents and close relatives are often exempt but must still meet the requirements for certain activities like overnight camps or formal mentoring, and all volunteers must commit to the school's child-safe expectations through training and declarations. Check with your child's school to ask about their safeguarding requirements for volunteers.

Primary stages:

Early Stage 1: Kindergarten

Stage 1: Year 1 and Year 2

Stage 2: Year 3 and Year 4

Stage 3: Year 5 and Year 6

Secondary stages:

Stage 4: Year 7 and Year 8

Stage 5: Year 9 and Year 10

Stage 6: Year 11 and Year 12

There are two credentials that may be attained in Years 7-12: Record of School Achievement (RoSA) and Higher School Certificate (HSC).

The educational program of NSW Catholic schools is based on and taught in accordance with the NESA syllabus outcomes for the 6 Key Learning Areas (KLAs) of primary education, and the NESA syllabus outcomes for Years 7-10. **Key learning areas** (KLAs) describe broad areas of learning. In NSW syllabuses are developed within the following KLAs:

PRIMARY (K-6)	SECONDARY (7-12)
English	English
Mathematics	Mathematics
Science and Technology	Science
Human Society and its Environment (HSIE)	Technologies
History	Human Society and its Environment (HSIE)
Geography	Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE)
Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE)	Creative Arts
Creative Arts	Languages
Languages	Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Standards-referenced **assessment** refers to the process of collecting and interpreting information about students' learning. It uses syllabus outcomes as key reference points for decisions about students' progress and achievement. **Formative assessment** occurs during learning to provide feedback for improvement, such as quizzes or in-class discussion. **Summative assessment** happens at the end of a learning period to evaluate overall achievement and includes exams.

Every year the **National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)** assesses the literacy and numeracy skills of students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NAPLAN tests complement the wide range of formal and informal assessments already conducted in schools.

Find out more about the NSW Curriculum here: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/nesa>

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.'

- 1 Thessalonians 5:11

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF STUDENT-PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

These meetings, whether face-to face at the school, online or by telephone, are an opportunity for you and your child's teacher to identify opportunity and discuss challenges to assist the student to reach their potential.

Did you know that some teachers experience more anxiety about their relationships and interactions with parents than any other aspect of their job? Can you imagine being a teacher and speaking to 30 parents about their children? Or more if you teach secondary school!

How to make the most of the time allocated for the conference:

Before the interview review the most recent school report and speak with your child to help you identify any challenges they may be facing.

1. Ask your child about how they feel they are performing in that class:
 - o What is your favourite thing about this class?
 - o What is your least favourite thing?
 - o What do you think the teacher will say about you?
2. Reflect on your child's answers and compare them with the school report.
3. Make a list of areas to discuss with the teacher.
4. During the interview refer to your list, take notes and ask for suggestions from the teacher.
5. Raise issues that are concerning you or your child.

6. Be open about discussing challenges that your child or family are facing.
7. Ask if there are opportunities to assist your child.
8. Agree on a plan and timeframe for action.
9. If you feel there is not enough time to complete the discussion arrange for another meeting.
10. Afterward, follow up with your child to share what you learned and discuss the action plan.

At the conclusion of the meeting, you might want to thank the teacher for their support of your child's learning.

Sample questions to ask:

- ▶ How is my child enjoying the class?
- ▶ Does my child finish the work in class?
- ▶ What are my child's strengths and weaknesses in this class?
- ▶ What are some specific strategies I can use at home to support their learning?
- ▶ How is my child progressing compared to others in the year?
- ▶ What are the biggest challenges my child faces in your class?
- ▶ What opportunities exist for my child to be challenged and supported?

After the interview:

Follow up with your child: Talk to your child about the meeting, share what you learned, and ask for their input on the action plan.

Implement the plan: Work with your child to put the agreed-upon plan into action at home.



LOVING LEARNING AT HOME

Education is most effective when parents show an interest in what their children are learning at school. Parents are encouraged to participate in their children's learning, both academic and spiritual, to speak the 'language of learning' at home, and understand that learning doesn't stop at the school gate - it continues at home, in conversations and through life experiences.

Believe they can achieve. Tell your children, 'I know you can do it!'

Parents can show children they are learners too. They reflect on their parenting, seek help when needed, and are open to feedback. They model humility and lifelong learning for their children. Children who see their parents growing in self-awareness and resilience learn to do the same. This sets a foundation for emotional wellbeing and ethical decision-making.

Talk about learning at home and foster curiosity by asking questions, visiting libraries and exploring topics together. Provide a quiet, supportive space for homework, study and hobbies, and encourage children to read, read read!

TWENTY WAYS TO SUPPORT LEARNING AT HOME

1. Show your child that you value education by ensuring their consistent attendance, pride in the uniform, making time for homework and talking positively about school. Let them know you want them to do well and you believe they can.
2. Role model 'life-long learning' for your child by being curious and interested in learning new things.
3. Keep up to date with what they're learning about at school by asking them or their teacher.
4. Take the time to listen to them talk about their school day and any challenges or issues or wins they had during the day.
5. Read books to your primary school child as often as possible.
6. Read your secondary school child's set texts so you can discuss the story and themes with them. Take turns reading a book together if they're struggling to focus.
7. Ask your primary school child to read books to you and discuss the characters and story with them.
8. Find activities to do or attend events on weekends that tie in with what your child is currently learning about at school.
9. Set up a well-lit, ventilated homework space at home with materials, technology, stationery and a comfortable desk and chair for your child.
10. Try to keep up to date with the communications and information technology your child is using at school.
11. Have a regular time in the evenings that your child does homework and that you are on hand to discuss the homework and help with questions.
12. Take up invitations to attend parent-teacher interviews either in person or online.
13. Read notes, emails and other forms of communication from the teacher to keep up to date with what's going on in the classroom and at school.
14. Make appointments with the teacher to discuss any issues or challenges you or your child are having with their learning
15. Attend any parental partnership sessions or other parent learning groups offered by the school such as classes for parents on maths or English or joint learning activities for parents and children.
16. Read your child's school reports and discuss the comments and marks with them. Follow up on any issues or problems with their teacher and ask how you can help your child at home.
17. Help your child plan their weeks and terms by plotting when exams and assignments are due and how they can complete work, study and meet deadlines.
18. Help your secondary child study by listening to them reading their notes or asking them questions from their notes and/or textbooks.
19. Help your child with assessments by reading through the requirements with them so that they understand the criteria and rubric.
20. As children get older be respectful of their changing requirements for you to be involved in their schoolwork and study.

HELPING YOUR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD WITH READING AT HOME

Practice in reading aloud is very important for literacy development. Reading with a **parent or carer** is a great opportunity to do this. When they bring readers home, you can help your child with the **PAUSE, PROMPT, PRAISE** method.

When your child is a beginning reader and has difficulty reading a word, the following has been shown to be the best way to help them:

1. PAUSE for 3-5 seconds – this is important because children can often work it out if given the time. They read more slowly than we do and need time to think. If we jump in too quickly, not only do we make them reliant on us to help them, but we undermine their self-confidence.

2. PROMPT – if the child cannot read the word, you can offer them a phonic (pronounced ‘fonic’) prompt.

- ▶ The first prompt should be a phonic prompt: ‘What’s the first sound in that word?’
- ▶ If they still can’t get it, sound the word for them with a slight pause between each sound (e.g. f...r...o...g). Encourage your child to sound out and then blend all through the word.
- ▶ You could also identify the first sound and encourage them to sound out the rest or break the word into its syllables. It may be useful to cover the word and reveal it slowly, looking at the sounds or the sections of the word.
- ▶ If they still have difficulty, tell them the word – and move on.

3. PRAISE is an important part of reading and you should give specific praise when they have corrected an error or read the word correctly after a prompt. Praise should be specific, e.g: ‘You figured that out by yourself’ or ‘I like the way you sounded out that word.’

For older students who might misread a word and continue, wait until they get to the end of the sentence before stopping them. Sometimes the reader will realise their mistake because it doesn’t make sense – and then self-correct – but they often need to get to the end of the sentence to realise this. You want children to be able to read for meaning, and it’s an important skill for them to develop. If you immediately stop and correct them again, you can undermine the development of this process.

If they read on into the next sentence you may then want to ask them:

- ▶ ‘Did that make sense?’ If they think it made sense, then ask them to read the sentence again. Sometimes they get it correct because they read more carefully this time.
- ▶ If they have misread a word for the second time, go back to the word and ask them to have a close look at it. If they recognise their mistake, read the sentence again with the correct word.
- ▶ If they cannot read the word, help them to break it up using the strategies above.
- ▶ If they still have trouble, provide the word and move on—but make a note of the word and have a look at it later on. Talk about the meaning of the word, perhaps it’s a new word for them, there’s an unfamiliar part of the word, or they don’t know how to pronounce it.

**Adapted from ‘Five from Five’ website:
www.fivefromfive.com.au**

TEN TOP TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD WITH READING AT HOME

1. During home reading time, turn off the television and electronic devices to decrease distractions.
2. Ask your child to read their favourite books to you and discuss the characters and story with them.
3. Create a comfy reading space at home.
4. Model quiet reading for your child - let them see you enjoy reading too!
5. Recognise and celebrate their success when they read.
6. Focus on what they are learning not how well they read.
7. Join the local library and visit weekly as a family.
8. Focus on reading what interests your child; let them choose the books they want to read.
9. Give books as gifts for birthdays and Christmas.
10. Let your child listen to audio books: listening to stories can support a child's academic growth, emotional development and love of literature.

HELPING YOUR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD WITH NUMBERS AT HOME

Numbers are everywhere and part of everyday life, so opportunities for children to practise their evolving maths skills are everywhere. Your attitude to maths matters, and you can build your child's confidence and capacity by talking about numbers, showing them how to use everyday maths, reading books that involve maths, and playing games that use numbers.

- 1. Talk about maths and numbers every day:** Be specific about how many when you ask your child to bring you an item e.g. if you're setting up the dinner table, ask for three spoons and five forks. Ask them to organise their toys and books from smallest to biggest. Tell them they can bring four stuffed animals to bed and pick two storybooks for you to read to them.
- 2. Show kids how to use maths in the real world:** Use fractions e.g. 'Let's have half a pie each'. Ask them about time: If it takes 10 minutes to get there, what time should we leave to be there at 3pm? Counting: How many steps does it take to get from the car to the front door? Money: How

much money do we need to pay for three apples? If your child is older, you can help them learn money management skills. Talk about budgeting, savings, discounts, and understanding credit cards.

- 3. Go grocery shopping:** Have your child gather, count and weigh items in the fruit and vegie section. Hunt for sales, compare prices, and count how many items are left on the shopping list as you go.
- 4. Get in the kitchen together:** Cooking and baking both have many maths elements involved such as fractions, measurements, shapes and time. Ask your child to help with reading instructions, measuring and weight ingredients and setting a timer.
- 5. Get out in the garden:** In the yard you can measure how far to space seeds apart, how much water is needed, temperatures that plants need to thrive and how deep to dig a hole.
- 6. Play to learn:** Many board games include features that require counting, identifying shapes and logic. Games like Scrabble, chess, dominos, Chinese checkers, concentration, solitaire, and card games like poker can also help improve

numeracy skills. Puzzles are great for kids of all ages. Look up online maths games that are suitable for primary school-aged children and sit with them while they play.

7. Read books about maths together: Look at maps together and talk about grids. Read illustrated books that involve finding and counting objects.

8. Get crafty: For some children, hands-on learning is the best way to understand new skills. Using arts and crafts is an effective way to help your child understand maths in a different way. You can use all kinds of materials for learning such as dry pasta, paper clips or crayons. Count them out and arrange them into shapes. Make necklaces and bracelets with beads. Create 3D objects out of plasticine. The options for tactile activities are endless.

SUPPORTING YOUR SECONDARY STUDENT IN MATHS AT HOME

By studying mathematics in secondary school, your child will learn to appreciate how mathematics is a relevant part of their everyday lives. They will have the opportunity to develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of mathematical concepts and a fluency with mathematical processes that will help them interpret and solve problems in a variety of contexts. Areas of study include number and algebra, measurement and space, statistics and probability.

HOW TEACHERS TEACH MATHS

In any mathematical process, there is a sequence of steps that is typically modelled by the teacher in the first instance. As teachers show the class how to do the process, they explain each step.

To understand the process, the students have to:


- ▶ follow each step of the teacher's explanation
- ▶ understand all the words used by the teacher
- ▶ recognise what is being written on the board
- ▶ remember the whole sequence

Students are then expected to practise the process themselves through additional problems.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

Parents have an important role in supporting children at home in their learning. Here are some ways you can help your child at home:

1. Ensure they practise their mathematics regularly at home.
2. Have a positive attitude when you talk about maths.
3. Contact the teacher for assistance if your child is having problems understanding what they're learning in maths.
4. Praise effort, and not just correct solutions.
5. Encourage your child to explain or show how they are using mathematics in everyday situations.

- 
6. Encourage mathematical thinking by asking them about the mathematics they use in activities like sport, cooking and shopping.
 7. Ask them to share their thinking when they are working towards a solution.
 8. Approach errors as opportunities to make new connections.
 9. Celebrate small steps in problem-solving.
 10. Engage with the digital syllabus to gain insight into the context of their learning.

SOURCES:

NESA: A parent and carer guide to supporting your child in Mathematics 7-10

NESA: Planning for success in secondary mathematics: An online resource for high school teachers, students and parents

Ley, Dr John: Supporting your child with secondary mathematics, Western Sydney University

MATHS WEBSITES FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS AND LINKS

CSSA - Trial HSC papers

<https://www.cssa.com.au/>

Eddie Woo Maths Videos 7-12

<https://misterwootube.com/>

Hotmaths

<https://www.hotmaths.com.au/>

Mathletics

<https://www.mathletics.com/au/for-home/>

Miss Draisey's Junior Secondary Maths Tutorials

@missdraiseysjuniorsecondar8539

Nrich

<https://nrich.maths.org/secondary>

Peter Blake Maths

<https://www.peterblakemaths.com/>

Wolframalpha

<https://www.wolframalpha.com/examples/mathematics/>

KenKen

<http://www.kenkenpuzzle.com/>



JOINING THE SCHOOL PARENT GROUP

School parent groups in NSW Catholic schools support the engagement of parents as partners in their children's learning and wellbeing, and their involvement in the life and community of the school and parish. Parents, in turn, have the opportunity to learn new skills and become leaders in their communities.

School parent groups are a key principle of effective parent engagement because they foster communication, collaboration and a shared purpose between parents and the school.

You are automatically a member of any parent group at your child's school.

School parent groups help to:

- ▶ develop a vibrant and nurturing community which encompasses the Catholic ethos of the school.
- ▶ promote interaction between home and school, parents and teachers.
- ▶ support and work in partnership with the principal and staff.
- ▶ create a forum for parent discussion.
- ▶ participate in decision making.
- ▶ assist parents to appreciate teaching and learning programs.
- ▶ promote parent engagement in their children's learning.
- ▶ plan and organise school and community functions.
- ▶ promote the school in the wider community.
- ▶ give attention to faith education activities
- ▶ assist in providing resources when necessary.



DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOL PARENT GROUPS

NSW Catholic dioceses and schools have traditionally run P&F Associations, and these have been and still are highly successful in some settings. Some schools choose to set up a school advisory board or a parent assembly that acts as a focus group for the school, for example.

Alternative models to P&Fs such as parent engagement groups (PEG), unlike constituted P&F Associations, offer a different model for schools where the formation or continuation of a P&F Association has been problematic because of lack of attendance or conflict, or the school community would prefer to adopt a model that does not include the election of an executive team from its membership, as these 'jobs' can be hard to fill. Variations on the PEG model exist in dioceses and schools in NSW and are named differently, but we'll call them PEGs here.

P&FS

A Parents and Friends Association has a formal constitution that governs the school parent group's operations and finances. The constitution is a 'rulebook' that provides direction on how to run a P&F meeting and guidance for members who nominate and are elected to executive roles including president, vice president, treasurer and secretary.

The P&F may be involved in providing:

- ▶ feedback on school policies and activities providing a parental perspective to assist the principal in decision-making
- ▶ additional resources to be used to enhance student learning
- ▶ parents with opportunities to be involved in engaging in their child's education.

GETTING STARTED WITH YOUR SCHOOL'S PARENT GROUP

If you are looking for a way to get involved with your school's parent group – and influence school life, support your children and build community – to get started, you could:

- ▶ Contact your school's administration office, principal or your child's teacher and ask if there's a current school parent group, then introduce yourself to the parent group lead.
- ▶ Ask to attend a meeting (many school parent groups meet monthly or termly).
- ▶ Offer your skills: help with an event, communications or a project.
- ▶ Be clear about your capacity: explain how much time you can commit (e.g. helping at one event, or being more involved on a committee).
- ▶ Attend a few meetings as a guest first to understand how things work, who the key people are, and what the priorities are.
- ▶ Remember that these meetings are not forums to raise individual concerns or complaints.

The P&F Association is not responsible for the management or functioning of the school, rather it supports the school and principal.

The P&F Association works with the principal and the school community in a productive partnership to support the best possible outcomes for students at the school.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT GROUPS

An informal school parent group can be better suited to contemporary family and school life. The focus of these groups is on the importance of authentic family engagement in student learning to strengthen the partnership between home and school and improve student outcomes – as opposed to raising funds for the school, for example.

The educative component of each meeting is intended to be an opportunity for parents to engage more deeply in their child's learning. This supports parents to partner with the school regarding decisions impacting their child as well as learn more about outcomes taught and ways they can support their child's learning at home.

The principal and school manage the monies, with no need for an ABN or separate accounts, making it less onerous for the group, and any parent can come to as many or few sessions as they like during the year.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MODEL FOR YOUR SCHOOL

If your school is at a crossroads in regards to the school parent group, or there hasn't been an active parent group for some time, it could be a good opportunity to work with your school principal to find out what would suit the parents. Are parents at your school best served by implementing a Parents & Friends Association (P&F) or a parent engagement group (if these are supported by your diocese)?

PARTNERING WITH THE PRINCIPAL

Whichever model of school parent group your school chooses, respectful interaction with the principal is a key responsibility for all group members. Even when disagreements arise, members should maintain professionalism and focus on shared objectives. Constructive communication fosters mutual understanding and a positive partnership.

The principal's role is to provide guidance, access to relevant information and align school priorities with the needs of parents and students. The school parent group supports the principal's leadership by understanding school management challenges and offering assistance where appropriate.

At every opportunity the principal and school parent group should work together to encourage parent engagement, creating meaningful ways for parents to contribute through events, programs or initiatives that benefit students.

CALLING A COMMUNITY MEETING

The best way to find out what your school community wants in a parent group is to ask them!

1. Work closely with the school's principal and discuss the possibility of calling a meeting of parents and invite the parish priest so that together all stakeholders can identify the needs of the community and make a collaborative decision regarding the most appropriate group.
2. At the meeting, the principal can talk the group through the history of the school's parent group and its current focus, attendance and capacity.

- Discussion can then be led by the principal, with opportunities for questions and answers, about the types of school parent groups that could be suitable for the school. Resource material accompanied by a presentation can show parents the pros and cons of both a formal P&F and the more informal PEG.
- Finally, a vote with a simple show of hands or ballot ensures that all parents at the meeting have their say about what they think is best for the school.

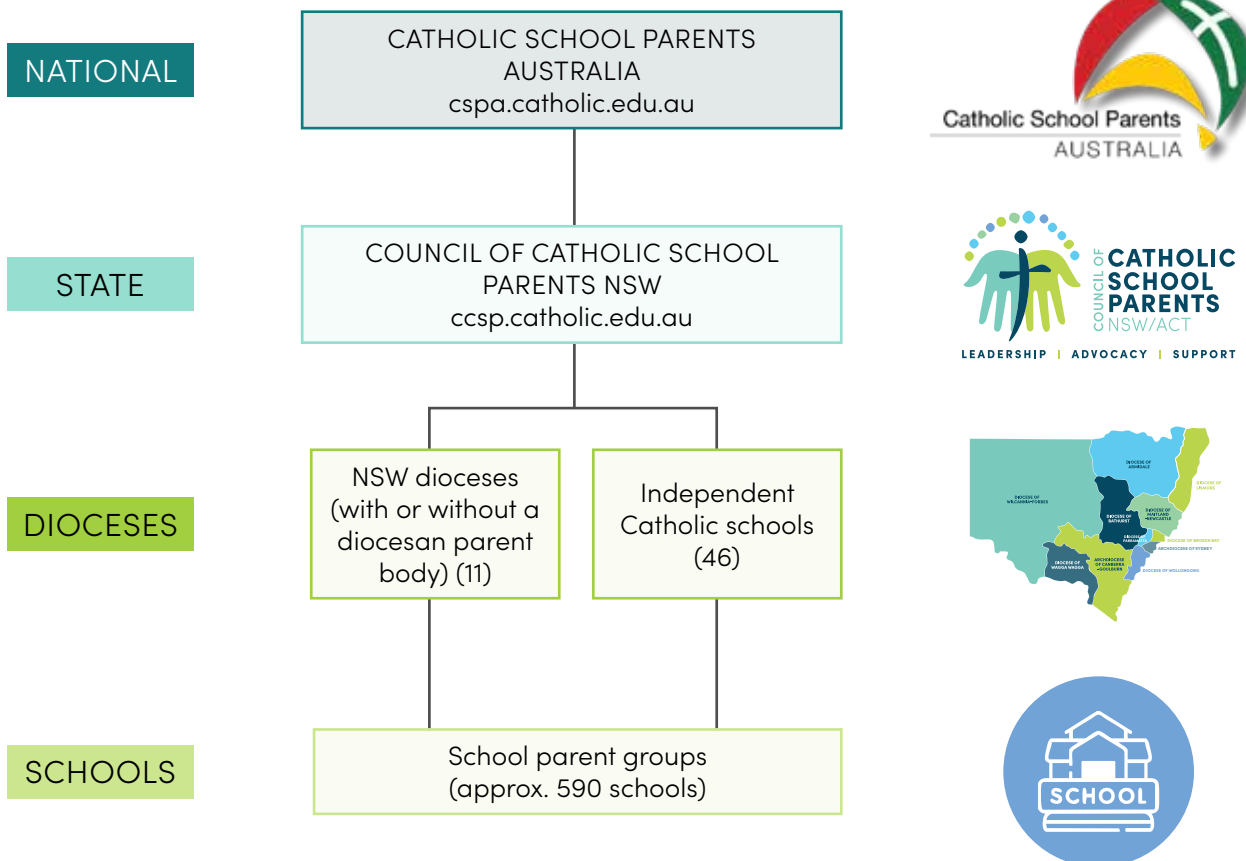
'And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.' - Colossians 3:14

NSW PARENT GROUPS - FROM NATIONAL TO GRASSROOTS LEVEL

Did you know that in addition to school parent groups, in NSW, parents with children in Catholic schools also have bodies to represent them at the diocesan level, the state level and the national level? This ensures that parents have a strong voice that advocates for their interests in funding, policy, curriculum, Catholic education, our schools and our families at every level of government.

This multi-level structure has been approved by the Bishops of NSW (for school, diocese and state parent bodies) and by the Australian Bishops (for the national parent body, CSPA).

ORGANISATION CHART



Thank you for reading! We hope you enjoyed finding out about how you can help your child and your child's school, and are feeling affirmed in what you're already doing as a parent and inspired to continue in your most important role: your child's first teacher. Here are some further resources and the sources used in the writing of this guide.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

AUDIT TOOLS AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDES FOR SCHOOLS

ACER, Family Engagement Practice Guides and Checklists

ACER, Promising Approaches Audit Tools for School Leaders and Primary and Secondary Classroom Teachers

ACER, School Improvement Tool

AITSL, Strengthening Parent Engagement to Improve Student Outcomes

ARACY, Parent and Family Engagement: An Implementation Guide for School Communities

ARACY, Please Just Say You're Proud of Me: Perspectives of Young People on Parent Engagement and Doing Well at School

Australian Government, Parent Engagement School Assessment Tool

CSPA, Family-School Communication Report

CSPA, Gearing Up for Parent Engagement in Learning Toolkit

Evidence for Learning, Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning

NSW Government, Parent and Carer Engagement Guide

People in Education, Doing What Matters Most: How parents can help their children succeed at school

BOOKS

Beyond the Bake Sale, Anne T. Henderson, New Press, 2007.

Bridging the Gaps Between Families and Schools, Nance M. Millar, PhD, St Paul's Publications, 2010.

Case Studies to Engage Every Family: Implementing the Five Simple Principles, Steven M Constantino, Corwin Press, 2023.

Do Parents Know They Matter? Alma Harris, Kirsti Andrew-Power, Janet Goodall, Continuum, 2009.

Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles 2E, Steven M Constantino, Corwin Press, 2021.

Everyone Wins: The Evidence for Family-School Partnerships and Implications for Practice, Karen L. Mapp et al, Scholastic, 2022

CHURCH DOCUMENTS ON THE ROLE OF FAMILIES

Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis), Vatican Council II, 1965.

The Catholic School, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977.

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982.

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988.

General Directory for Catechesis, Congregation of the Clergy, 1997.

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997.

Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful, Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS AND GUIDING DOCUMENTS

Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration

Australian Government Department of Education:

- Better Fairer Schools Agreement (2025-2034)
- Family-School Partnerships Framework
- Australian Student Wellbeing Framework: Partnerships

AITSL Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles:

- Professional Practice: Engaging and working with the community

Australian Professional Standards for Teaching:

- Focus area 3.7: Engage parents/carers in the educative process
- Standard 7 - Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community
- Focus area 7.3: Engage with parents/carers

National Catholic Safeguarding Standards: Standard 3 - Partnering with Families, Carers and Communities

National School Improvement Tool: Domain 9 - Building School-Community Partnerships

NSW Department of Education

- Parent and Carer Engagement Framework
- **Statement of Intent: Our Shared Commitment**, jointly issued by the NSW Department of Education, Catholic Schools NSW and the Association of Independent Schools NSW

WEBSITES

Catholic Education Office Archdiocese of Melbourne, Parent Engagement in Action: A practical guide and toolkit for schools

Catholic Schools Broken Bay, **Parent Charter and Parent Engagement Coordinator model** srcpddb.catholic.edu.au+2Catholic Schools+2St Peter's Catholic College+2

Catholic Schools NSW, **Family and Community Engagement** webpage Catholic Schools NSW

Council of Parent with a child in a Catholic schools (NSW/ACT), role, functions, and charters mccwddb.catholic.edu.au+2ccsp.catholic.edu.au+2Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney+2

CSPA Family Engagement Toolkit <https://www.parentengagementcspa.edu.au/>

Daily Telegraph (May 2025), highlights importance of discipline and parental involvement in Catholic Schools NSW survey Daily Telegraph

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/engage-parents#:~:text=School%20Safety%20Committees-,Benefits%20of%20Parent%20and%20Youth%20Engagement,bullied%20or%20is%20bullying%20others.>

NESA: Helping Your Child with Literacy and Numeracy at Home: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/resources-for-parents-and-carers/helping-your-child-with-literacy-and-numeracy-at-home>

CSNSW Foundations for Learning Resource: <https://www.csnsw.catholic.edu.au/foundationsforlearning/Code of Canon Law>, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib3-cann793-821_en.html

NSW Department of Education, **Parent & Carer Engagement Framework, Parent and Carer Engagement Guide** (2023-24 update) resources.education.nsw.gov.au+1Education NSW+1

Parent with a child in a Catholic schools Australia (CSPA), **Parent Engagement Toolkit / Family Engagement** sydcatholicsschools.nsw.edu.au+15cspa.catholic.edu.au+15cspa.catholic.edu.au+15

St Peter's Catholic College (Broken Bay), **Parent Charter** example St Peter's Catholic College

PARENTS MATTER, AND WHEN THEY WORK TOGETHER WITH SCHOOL LEADERS AND STAFF TO CREATE A COLLABORATIVE, INCLUSIVE CULTURE FOCUSED ON LEARNING, THE WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY BENEFITS.

Catholic schools thrive when every parent knows they belong, they are valued and they make a difference. Schools would love you to be involved and engaged in your children's learning by

- ▶ Understanding what schools mean by 'parent engagement'
- ▶ Helping to build respectful relationships
- ▶ Creating caring Catholic communities
- ▶ Supporting learning at school
- ▶ Encouraging learning at home
- ▶ Being part of the parent group

In this guide, we include information and tips to help parents be partners in their child's education, guided by Gospel values and the dignity of all people. With faith, communication, love and shared responsibility, every parent has the capacity to work with their school to help their child flourish in life, learning and faith.

Please also look for our other resources for parents on our website:
ccsp.catholic.edu.au

OUR CATHOLIC FAITH: A HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES OF STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

SUPPORTING DIVERSE LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: A GUIDE BY PARENTS FOR PARENTS



COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS NSW/ACT

 Level 7, Angel Place, 123 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000

 www.ccsp.catholic.edu.au

 office@ccsp.catholic.edu.au

 02 9287 1514

 @cathschoolparents

ABN 31821542696