Early Childhood Education and Care
The Queensland Catholic sector offers an educational program to children turning four years old in the year before they commence Prep in 24 Catholic kindergartens. The kindergartens are managed and operated by delegated Catholic agencies: Diocese of Cairns (Catholic Early Learning and Care), Diocese of Townsville (St Mary Mackillop Kindergartens), Diocese of Rockhampton (Early Learning and Care), Archdiocese of Brisbane and Diocese of Toowoomba (Centacare Child Care Services) and the Order of the Canossian Sisters. QCEC has been approved by the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) to be a Central Governing Body (CGB) that has responsibility for the distribution of funding to Catholic kindergartens.

Education program
The education program offered to kindergarten children is based on the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority (QCAA) accredited program, the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline (QKLG). The national document is based on three central themes: Belonging, Being and Becoming and views children’s learning as dynamic, complex and holistic – ‘the physical, social, emotional, personal, spiritual, creative, cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning are all interwoven and interrelated.’ All early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are expected to nurture the spiritual dimension of each child. For Catholic kindergartens nurturing the spiritual dimension of young children takes on special significance.

Spiritual development in the early years
QCEC has collaborated with the delegated Catholic agencies and Australian Catholic University to nurture early childhood spirituality in Catholic kindergartens. To date, documents developed are: QCEC Early Childhood Education and Care Position Statement (2010), A Review of Literature – Spiritual Development and Religious Education in the Early Years (2010), and Framework for Early Years Spiritual Development in the Catholic Tradition (2010). QCEC has facilitated professional learning days for kindergarten teachers which have focused on describing spirituality, examining the characteristics of early childhood spirituality, and exploring effective ways to embed spiritual development into everyday teaching and learning practices. Teachers have been encouraged to embed meaningful activities that nurture children’s’ spiritual domain into their early learning environments. Teaching strategies include making connections between themes in children’s literature to the values Jesus told in his parables, encouraging children to respond to the wonder and awe of God’s creation and taking ‘teachable’ moments as they arise. These activities are seen as part of early faith formation and not a formal religious education program.

Opportunities and challenges
Just like Catholic schools, Catholic kindergartens are distinctive from other state-based or community operated services. The relationships between all members of the kindergarten community form the basis of this distinctive nature – what would you expect to see, hear and feel when you walk into a Catholic early childhood education and care service? How do children, educators and parents relate to each other? Are the values of the Catholic Church evident in the words and actions of all within the community?
A discussion paper on Catholic Early Childhood Education and Care Services in Queensland aims to be a stimulus to bring together key stakeholders to explore the challenges and opportunities in the provision of early childhood education and care services. Aspects such as the role of the Church and parish in supporting
families and children, the Catholic identity and culture of early childhood services, and the nature and purpose of educator’s practice and program in a Catholic setting. It is an exciting, challenging and rewarding time for all involved in the education and care of young children to ensure every child in our care gets the best start in life.

**QCEC CGB - Catholic kindergartens**

**ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE and DIOCESE OF TOOWOOMBA - CENTACARE CHILD CARE SERVICES**

- Emmaus Kindergarten, JIMBOOMBA
- Our Lady of Good Counsel Kindergarten, GATTON
- St Anthony’s Kindergarten ALEXANDRA HILLS
- St Benedict’s Kindergarten, MANGO HILL
- St Francis Xavier Kindergarten, GOODNA
- St Kevin’s Kindergarten, BENOWA
- St Mary’s Kindergarten, BEAUDESERT
- St Mary’s Kindergarten, WARWICK
- Xavier Kindergarten, ELI WATERS

**DIOCESE OF CAIRNS**

- Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Kindergarten, THURSDAY ISLAND
- Catholic Community Kindergarten, SILKWOOD

**DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON**

- Emmanuel Kindergarten, MOUNT PLEASANT
- St Brigid’s Catholic Pre-preparatory Centre, EMERALD
- St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School Pre-preparatory Centre, BARCALDINE
- St Joseph’s Catholic Pre-preparatory Centre, BILOELA
- St Joseph’s Catholic Pre-preparatory Centre, BLACKALL
- St Joseph’s Kindergarten, NORTH ROCKHAMPTON
- Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Primary School Pre-preparatory Centre, SPRINGSURE

**DIOCESE OF TOWNSVILLE**

- Ryan Catholic College Kindergarten, KIRWAN
- St Anthony’s Kindergarten, DEERAGUN
- St Clare’s Kindergarten, BURDELL
- St Joseph’s Kindergarten, MT ISA
- St Joseph’s Kindergarten, NORTH WARD

**ORDER OF THE CANOSSIAN SISTERS**

- Canossa Kindergarten, COORPAROO