Queensland Catholic Education Commission

A report on the implementation of the Defining Features of Catholic schools in Queensland Dioceses

November 2008
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1. Background to the report:

This report is the culmination of a project initiated by QCEC as part of its Strategic Priority 7.7.1, "To Improve the Integrity of the Catholic Education system beyond Defining Features". The initial Defining Features project, conducted at the request of the Queensland bishops, was affected over the years 1998 to 2001 culminating in the preparation of five diocesan reports each identifying a set of Defining Features of Catholic Schools for the 21st Century for their diocese. Each of these reports was accepted by the appropriate Archbishop or Bishop, published in that diocese and adopted as a basis for diocesan action. Religious Institute schools participated in the project as part of their respective diocesan communities. In 2006, QCEC made the decision to review progress of the impact of the Defining Features in each diocese and authorised this strategic project for that purpose. In 2008, following the receipt of the progress reports, the data was analysed and this report was written.

2. Purpose of the report:

The purpose of this report is to inform the Queensland Catholic Education Commission of progress made by dioceses in implementing the Defining Features of Catholic Schools for the 21st Century as well as to identify emerging issues in relation to the Catholic identity of Catholic schools. It is worth noting at this point that each had different defining features as they deemed appropriate from their particular perspective. These are as follows:

2.1 Diocese of Rockhampton:
- Give witness to the message of Jesus and the mission of the Church
- Have a clear Catholic identity
- Be communities of care
- Offer a relevant and holistic curriculum of quality teaching and learning
- Be open and accessible to all who seek their values
- Be characterised by inclusive partnerships within a community of faith

2.2 Diocese of Townsville:
- Have a consistent commitment to Gospel values
- Play an integral role in the evangelizing mission of the Church
- Model God’s love for all by being a renewing community where all are valued and empowered
- Be staffed by qualified, competent people who give witness to Gospel values
- Be communities of learning that provide quality, relevant, holistic education
- Be sacred places where the spiritual life is nurtured
- Be welcoming and open to all who seek as Catholic education

2.3 Diocese of Cairns:
- Bringing faith and life together through the Good News of Jesus Christ
- Celebrating God’s abundant and abiding presence in all creation
- Sustaining our communities through life-giving relationships
- Welcoming all who seek to share in the life of our schools
- Teaching and learning that is lifelong, vital and holistic
Undertaking continuous self renewal, and working as agents of change
Building constructive covenants with our partners in education

2.4 Diocese of Toowoomba:

- Attentiveness to the life giving presence of God
- Ministry within the Church
- Place of learning
- Community of care
- Inclusive and outreaching culture
- Continuous improvement through renewal

2.5 Archdiocese of Brisbane

- Promote the dynamic vision of God’s love manifest in the life and mission of Jesus Christ
- Recognise and nurture the spirituality of each person
- Be a place of quality learning and teaching
- Continue to act in partnership with families
- Provide an authentic experience of Catholic Christian community
- Be open to those who support its values
- Be experienced as a community of care

3. Data gathering process

Research was framed around the following broad questions which formed the basis of the data gathering process.

Question 1: What progress has been made since the time of the adoption of the Defining Features by the diocese?

Question 2: What successes and gaps can be identified, and what can be learned from them?

Question 3: What relevant issues have emerged since, or as a consequence of, the adoption of the Defining Features?

Question 4: What have been the areas of impact of the Defining Features of Catholic Schools for the 21st Century in the diocese?

These questions were adapted by each diocese and used according to their particular data gathering needs and according to their particular defining features. It needs to be noted that each diocesan report was idiosyncratic as is appropriate considering such contextual issues as geographic location, population structure and size of diocese.

The following table (Table One) indicates the range of methods used by the dioceses to gather data to provide information and to identify issues and challenges.
## Table One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data types</th>
<th>Data gathering methods</th>
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<td><strong>What progress has been made since the time of their adoption by the diocese?</strong></td>
<td>• Senior diocesan educational leaders</td>
<td>• Opinions / observations of knowledgeable individuals</td>
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<td><strong>What successes and gaps can be identified, and what can be learned from them?</strong></td>
<td>• School based personnel</td>
<td>• Official positions of the organisation</td>
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<td><strong>What relevant issues have emerged since, or as a consequence of, the adoption of the Defining Features?</strong></td>
<td>• Parents and wider community</td>
<td>• Policy shifts</td>
<td>• Focus groups</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What have been the areas of impact of the Defining Features of Catholic Schools for the 21st Century in the diocese?</strong></td>
<td>• Bishops / priests</td>
<td>• Structural changes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Members of original Defining Features research Think Tanks</td>
<td>• Organisational orientations and priorities</td>
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<td>• Parents &amp; Friends Committees</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Diocesan records</td>
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4. Initiatives

There was a wide variety of initiatives utilised across the dioceses, including Religious Institute schools in respective dioceses, to embed the defining features. The Defining Features are an authentic part of diocesan and school life. Each diocese reported that their initiatives were implemented at both school and system level. This ensured that the responsibility for the implementation was spread across both stakeholders. Without exception dioceses had made a concerted effort to ensure that the Defining Features were embedded in all aspects of the organisation and this is a matter for commendation.

4.1 System Initiatives

4.1.1 Marketing and Promotion

Some dioceses reported that they have used the Defining Features in marketing and promotions work. Banners and advertisements were developed to incorporate the themes inherent in the Defining Features. These promotional materials, aimed particularly at the wider community were used to describe how school are united and defined by their commitment to the Defining Features, “while others display an explanation of our purpose in providing education underpinned by our Catholic faith and identity” (Cairns diocese). Other dioceses ensure that the Defining Feature/s is, “clearly visible on newsletters and correspondence from the Catholic Education Office” (Toowoomba diocese).

4.1.2 Policies and Frameworks

Evidence from diocesan reports indicates that the Defining Features have been used as the foundation for Strategic Planning processes. The features were used to ensure authenticity to the long term vision for the future of the organisation. This was achieved when “defining features...combined with a vision of a long term future for our schools, staff and students” (Cairns diocese). One useful description of the use to which the features were used is as follows:

They provided a means of focussing the spotlight on those things that are most important to us in ensuring that Catholic schools remain true to the mission objective of spreading the Gospel message and provide high quality educational experiences of students (Cairns diocese).

Other dioceses are working holistically to encourage cultures that explicitly support the Defining Features. One example of many is the development of a policy, Education of the Marginalised which states that “the inclusive model of education is the paradigm which the Catholic school embraces...inclusivity requires that the operation of
Catholic schools be flexible to meet changing needs” (Toowoomba diocese). The commitment to inclusivity as a defining feature is evident in the development of Equity and Inclusion Policies and Committees in each diocese. Many of these committees have a broad base of members from both school and diocesan offices. The goal of these committees is to promote the concept of inclusion and to facilitate communication between all involved in the provision of appropriate education to all students.

Planning and policy documents have been developed and organisational structures modified to ensure a clear connection with the Defining Features. One example focussed on their ministry by reorganising their Services Team to provide a clear focus on teaching and learning ensuring an holistic approach. The policy document, which framed this reorganisation process, Stewardship – Pastoral and Organisational Framework, "outlines the foundations that underpin the ministry of CES and provide a guide to the provision of services and association stewardship within the overall life of the diocesan church” (Cairns Diocese).

Staff positions within Catholic Education Offices support the Defining Features in a practical way. One such example of this is the role of Education Officer – English as a Second Language in the Toowoomba diocese which supports the Inclusive and Outreaching Culture feature. "Previously a part-time position, this appointment was upgraded to a full-time Education Officer because of the need the better cater for overseas and refugee students in schools”. Other dioceses have similar positions according to the needs of their location.

Frameworks such as the Diocesan Learning Frameworks have been supported by the Defining Features; these in turn were developed into working documents in schools to support curriculum initiatives which both explicitly and implicitly support the implementation of the Defining Features. This occurred not just in the frameworks for Religious Education, but also in the other curriculum in areas such as Social Science where environmental issues such as long term sustainability and climate change are prioritised. Such school based initiatives dovetailed into the system initiatives which encouraged, “A developing awareness and promotion of ecological responsibility, for example Environmental Audits, On Holy Ground” (Townsville diocese).

### 4.1.3 Taking a public stance on community issues

From time to time and where deemed appropriate, Catholic Education Offices issue media statements on matters of community concern. One such issue in 2008 was the Apology by the Prime Minister to the Stolen Generation. Offices explicitly supported The Apology through media
releases and liturgies; however ongoing commitment to indigenous Australians is evident in policies and programmes such as *Harmony in Between* from Rockhampton diocese and the ongoing employment of indigenous people in positions of responsibility.

### 4.1.4 Formation in and for leadership positions within schools

The formation of current leaders and potential leaders is a priority for all dioceses. Each has a programme of formation in place that begins with the induction of new leaders, the appraisal and support of continuing leaders and programmes to support those who have leadership aspirations. Dioceses report that the Defining Features material is used in induction sessions with new principals and as part of the package sent out in response to inquiries about advertised leadership positions thus providing a focus and direction to those new to the diocese.

Principals and others in leadership positions are offered professional formation opportunities that can be personalised to suit individual needs. For example there is provision for study leave, practical and financial assistance to improve qualifications especially in the area of Religious Education and Educational Leadership. It has been a long term practice for dioceses to support principals and other school leaders in gaining Post Graduate qualifications.

Diocesan offices also offer spiritual support and formation experiences in a variety of ways such as Principal and Leadership Team retreats and reflection days, “such reflections are inspired by the ‘being’ and ‘doing’ of Catholic Education in partnership with the defining feature of *Ministry within the Church*” (Toowoomba Diocese) and are repeated across the state in other dioceses.

### 4.1.5 Professional Staff formation programmes

All dioceses have operational programmes designed to ensure that staff in diocesan offices and schools are actively formed in their mission of Catholic education. This occurs both at the time of induction and into formation throughout the person’s career. One of the significant consequences of the Defining Features has been the reflection and discussion that has occurred across the dioceses. Bishop’s In-service days have had the Defining Features as topics for all staff, not just teaching staff in many dioceses and dioceses report that speakers use the Defining Features as their focal point for their addresses.

Dioceses report that formation in the Defining Features has resulted in an increased awareness and acceptance by the broad Catholic
education community that Catholic education and the values that flow from this are the responsibility of all school and diocesan staff, not just teachers in the school. While much of the formation of principals and other school leaders reflects the paradigm of the Defining Features, there is also a sense that this has had an incremental effect on the formation of the total Catholic education community.

It is not just the support of the overtly religious or faith aspects of the defining features that forms part of diocesan formation and development programmes. Reorganisation of programmes and organisational strategies has occurred to be cognisant of the defining features. For example:

*Also currently under development is the Diocesan ‘Digital Learning Programmes and Strategies for 2008 and beyond’ clearly outlining the majority of Strategic Priority intentions and expectations associated with their suggested strategies. Here a concern has been raised about incorporating a faith perspective to ICT (Cairns diocese)*

### 4.1.6 Working with local clergy

Working positively with local clergy was one way that respondents reported that the Defining Features were developed across dioceses. One diocese held a whole of diocese discussion day which was “attended by parish priests, pastoral leaders, TCEO personnel and principals in 2006 with another planned for 2008” (Townsville diocese), while another reported that the Defining Features were “a fundamental part of the Executive Director and Vicar of Education’s presentation to the Synod held in the Diocese in May” (Cairns diocese). While this aspect was affirmed as one means of ensuring the authenticity of the Defining Features, it was also recognised that external factors such as the number of clergy sometimes made this difficult.

### 4.2 School Initiatives

#### 4.2.1 Enrolment policies and practices

All dioceses report that they have an ongoing commitment to providing a Catholic education to those who seek enrolment and who support our values. In practical terms this means that schools offer fee reductions and remissions according to the family means. Generally schools budget for a percentage of fee remission according to the needs of students. At both diocesan and school level there is a commitment to “work to ensure that school fee and levy policies are consistent with Catholic principles of justice, equity and accessibility” (Brisbane archdiocese). Some schools actively welcome Indigenous students,
students from refugee families and students with disabilities as an expression of authenticity to both Catholic Social Teaching and the defining features.

4.2.2 Curriculum initiatives

The Religious Education programmes in schools are one direct way where the curriculum reflects and supports the Defining Features of the Catholic school. Students are encouraged to reflect on their role in developing their own spirituality while being “directly taught the values and principles that we as a Catholic community hold as important” (Townsville diocese). This implicit teaching occurs within the framework of Religious Education Guidelines for each diocese and it is complemented by studies in the areas of Science and Social Science, among other disciplines, where students are encouraged to be environmentally and ecologically sensitive through such activities as completing environmental audits and looking at the notion of sustainability (Townsville diocese).

4.2.3 Pastoral care practices

Catholic schools have well developed pastoral care programmes and practices. For all dioceses this is a priority and can provide and authentic experience of Catholic community. One school reported, “People remark, ‘you can feel something special as soon as you walk in here’” (Brisbane Archdiocese). These pastoral care practices extend further than the students of the school. Schools are committed to the pastoral support of parents and staff. Parents are encouraged to be part of school communities in well documented ways. This includes the myriad of support groups by which families can feel part of the school community.

4.2.4 Social Justice and Social Action programmes

As part of their commitment to Catholic Social Teaching as a defining feature of Catholic schools, all schools participate in social justice and social action programmes. Dioceses report that they are tailored to the particular school context and include support for local and international Catholic Church agencies “such as Caritas, St Vincent de Paul and Catholic Mission” (Brisbane Archdiocese). As well young people in schools are committing to practical social action through commitment to Edmund Rice camps and in recent days, World Youth Day activities in increasing numbers.
4.2.5 Developing community understanding of Defining Features

The need to inform and form the local school community was seen as important by dioceses. Information and formation in the defining features was carried out in many and varied ways. Principals used the features as a regular part of their newsletters, others utilised them as a platform to move from rhetoric to reality, as one principal articulated,

*In the ‘busyness’ of the Catholic schools, these defining features have provided the tools with which to critique policy, practice and relationships. This has prompted a return to these central features in ensuring we have greater accountability, inclusion, inward and outward ministry and just policies* (Toowoomba diocese).

In one diocese an interesting use of the defining features for parent and community formation was reported. “One school used it as a basis of engaging with the local indigenous community; the same principal chose to use the defining features as the key topic in his talk to the Catholic Men’s group in the region” (Cairns diocese). The same diocese reported that a principal new to the diocese commented that the document grounded her understanding of the direction for Catholic education with clarity and richness.

5. Areas of Challenge

All dioceses reported that, while they believe that the Defining Features had been instruments of cultural change, there were still challenges to be met to ensure that the Defining Features were a reality in offices and schools. The following challenges and associated issues were highlighted across the dioceses.

5.1 Understanding “Witness to Jesus” and “Church mission” in a contemporary Catholic school context

One challenge that arises from the contemporary context finds its genesis in the changing relationship between the Catholic school and the local clergy. Reports from dioceses indicated that this concern is centred on how schools understand their ecclesial nature and identity within the rapidly changing pastoral leadership of the schools. Dioceses attempted to develop more opportunities to engage with clergy and religious in the spiritual development of their communities and some Religious Institute schools maintain connection with their founding congregation. In general there is recognition of the reality of diminishing numbers of clergy and religious and the issues that arise from this. As one report described the situation
As families in the school can have little experience of Church. Opportunities to dialogue with Parish Priests and/or Pastoral Associates/Leaders are limited and formal, with informal interaction between school and parish becoming less frequent. The context of Ministry within Church is one of change, growth and empowerment in different ways....There are many different scenarios in the Diocese in relation to Priest, Parish and school and the challenges for ministry within the Church are many (Toowoomba diocese).

Many schools attempted to retain and revisit religious traditions by celebrating Founders’ Feast days and the promotion of the particular charism of the school’s religious orders. Others use practical examples of Catholic practice through the regular celebration of Eucharist and liturgy in an everyday context as well as in wider community celebrations such as Awards Evenings. Dioceses report these as positive experience however there was general concern about parental involvement with parish communities. One diocese reported that many schools “struggle to provide sacramental experiences for their students and they have little meaningful connection with parish communities” (Rockhampton diocese).

5.2 The dilemma of what it means to be “open and accessible to all”

Dioceses report that this is one dilemma that is at the forefront of schools and systems’ thinking. The increasing popularity of Catholic schools for non Catholic families is a matter for discussion and reflection. Some parents chose Catholic schools for their values while others see these schools as a cheap “private education”. This issue is difficult for schools, “as they are relying on an interview process and some parents are not always looking for a Catholic education but a cheap private education”. The reverse of this problem is that “others (mainly poorer families) would like to be at Catholic schools but often aren’t aware of avenues which allow them to attend e.g. fee relief” (Rockhampton diocese).

For students with disabilities and special needs, the notion of accessibility and openness is one that is widely acknowledged.. Dioceses report that schools are limited by their financial ability to support these young people; when funding does not always match the need. Dioceses are aware of the challenges of this defining feature and have made provision for professional staff formation for staff who work with students with special needs and learning difficulties and the integration of refugee students in schools. In working towards a school community that is open and accessible to all who support its values, dioceses report that there is a need to maintain and strengthen the catholicity of the school.

The commissioning by Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Brisbane of an ACER research project into “Who’s coming to school today?” is a positive attempt to gather informed data in relation to the aspirations of parents
and students in attending Catholic schools and will provide better information about their particular circumstances. The Archdiocese has also revised its Enrolment Policy, with the Defining Features being an important context.

5.3 The nature of teaching as a vocation

As previously discussed, society and Church have changed and teaching as a vocation lacks clarity. What constitutes a vocation is still a matter for discussion and reflection. Teachers and school leaders understand that their role is one of exemplar or role model, however the complexities of modern life mean that teachers and school leaders have wider responsibilities and this needs to be understood and accepted. “Recognition and acceptance that as much as staff are members of the school community, they are also members of the wider community and therefore have responsibilities and life experiences that can complement the Catholic school” (Townsville diocese).

5.4 Managing the change process

Dioceses report that managing the needs of staff is another challenge school leaders confront in implementing the Defining Features. The impact of changing government policy can cause stress and concern for staff and school leaders. Increasing demands on teacher time can mean that academic imperatives take precedence over the message of Jesus. Such an issue is compounded by the likelihood that like many parents, “a substantial number of staff have no experience of or interest in parish life as it is currently offered and expressed” and are less “churched” than they once were (Rockhampton diocese). Dioceses have begun the process through quality professional and spiritual formation which addresses the question of what Catholic identity symbolizes in the context of the demands on already busy school leaders.

Concerns about the change process were articulated and dioceses stated that while Catholic schools are attempting to shape,

An identity that is faithful to the Catholic Church but also connects meaningfully with the lives and experiences of the families they serve. This is a confronting exercise because it demands new thinking, questioning and imagination to clarify the mission of our Catholic schools. Some are not open to or receptive of such dialogue. It also reinforces the critical role of leadership in Catholic schools (Rockhampton diocese)

5.5 Translating the Defining Features into language relevant for the whole community

One concern identified by dioceses was the nature of the language used in the Defining Features documents. For many parents and those in the wider
community, language used bears little resemblance to that used in common parlance. Principals articulated that it was a difficulty in expressing or translating the features to parents, staff and the wider community especially to those with tenuous links to the Catholic Church apart from their connection with the schools. It seems that there is an imperative to work within school communities to embed the language of the Defining Features within all school communications to endure that “Jesus is central to the message from schools” (Townsville diocese). There was a clear challenge that unless accessibility was ensured the message of the Defining Features could be lost.

6. Issues and Potential Activities

Clearly there is much to be applauded in the implementation of the defining features in all dioceses and in Religious Institute schools; however if these are to continue to grow and develop then there is need for insightful reflection on the way forward. This section of the report offers a summary of the issues and potential activities that dioceses suggest might support the features into the future.

6.1 Keeping the focus on the Defining Features

Some dioceses articulated that the Defining Features need to be a key focus, one that is “engaged with seriously by staff and parents, unpacked, given their particular local interpretation, and used as a guide and a touchstone for practice at diocesan, district level” (Rockhampton diocese). There was clearly a commitment to ensure that the documents are used into the future and not become moribund. In others dioceses (e.g. Brisbane) the Defining Features are a foundation for more integral school renewal processes which have a clearer language and more concrete direction. The latter have a greater importance in reality.

Some suggestions for maintaining the focus included:

- Working with Principals/leadership Teams and their Parish Priests to unpack the Defining Features and how they might be better used by communities
- Providing a copy of all documents in appropriate form for key school and parish personnel for public display and use
- Updating of and further development of resources such as videos to CD, teaching and learning programmes with appropriate explanation and comment to support the faith journey of staff and to support their professional development
- Declaring 2009 The Year of the Defining Features with each feature being the focus of every school community. This would be led by the Executive Director through newsletters and other communications
- Aligning all strategic planning documents with the defining features beginning with the Strategic Plan for the diocese and moving through to schools to provide a framework for action
Presenting the defining features in a variety of different frameworks to make them accessible to the wider education community

Making staff formation the top priority so there can continue to be serious and professional engagement with the Defining Features

Ensuring that Boards and Parent groups are adequately informed in the defining features

Aligning the Defining Features with teacher requirements and Accreditation to Teach and to Teach Religious Education in a Catholic school and the Queensland College of Teachers Continuing Professional Development Framework

Developing a review or audit in schools on an annual basis or at the end of a five year cycle to explore how the features are impacting on school life

Developing a cross diocesan forum or other process to share best practice across the state into the implementation and development of the features

Exploration of policy developments with Boards to ensure that there is a common understanding of concepts in the features

Supporting research and investigation of practical ways to strengthen the features especially in the wider community

6.2 Re-examination of Catholic identity

Clearly the diocesan reports indicated that there is a continual need to reflect on what it means to be a Catholic in the 21st century and the ways that this identity can be communicated especially in the context of Catholic education. The changing nature of society and Church have already been highlighted as a challenge and the need for formation of all within the school community, staff, students and parents is a priority for all dioceses.

Some suggestions for re-examining Catholic identity included:

Presenting Jesus and the Gospels as the Good News and use all available avenues including new and emerging technologies to promote the Jesus message and make the "New Evangelisation" relevant today

Explore with all stakeholders the role of the Catholic school in the development of identity especially as countercultural to secular values and practices

Explore what it means to be Catholic and find ways to articulate it confidently at all available forums

Continue and enhance relationships with clergy and religious through involving them in the spiritual development of staff, students and other members of the school and wider community.

Developing mechanisms to ensure that regular meetings and discussion take place to explore how the Defining Features could be a lived document at diocesan level and the involvement in spiritual and ecclesial staff formation

Networking of School Boards through meetings or dinners to build community and relationships and offer appropriate professional development in the features

Re-imagining and building upon foundational charisms of schools
6.3 Formation of young people

World Youth Day and the increasing interest of young people in Catholic schools in matters of Social Justice and Spirituality are avenues that can be utilised for positive formation experiences.

Some suggestions for the formation of young people included:

- Making use of new and emerging technology to provide positive formation experiences
- Providing student formation sessions that focus on justice, spirituality and environment issues
- Highlighting the vocation of teaching to young people
- Exploring way of encouraging youth to become actively involved in Church life and encouraging the Church communities to identify modes of prayer, praise and worship that are culturally relevant but still recognise the Catholic tradition
- Further involvement of school chaplains and campus ministers in linking schools with parish and the worshipping Catholic community

6.4 Increasing emphasis on leadership development

The role of leadership in the progression of the Defining Features has been highlighted in diocesan responses. In both the school and system context the complexity of education has resulted in increasing demand on leaders. There is of necessity the need to accommodate the tension and competing demands of leadership, that of academic outcomes and the holistic development of the young person in a Catholic school.

Some suggestions for leadership development included:

- Broadening support for qualifications in Religious Education and Educational Leadership to include areas such as: Learning Support, Students with Special Needs and Information Technology
- Increased support at systems level for principals to ensure that they are appropriately formed in the Defining Features
- Further development to ensure that the commitment to Gospel values is given appropriate attention and prominence

7. Concluding remarks

Dioceses and schools are to be commended on the data which they provided for this report. The variety and breadth of activities and programmes which have been implemented in the defining features projects are indicative of the commitment of the dioceses to ensuring the authenticity of Catholic education in the various contexts across Queensland. The Defining Features are supportive documents for Catholic schools in Queensland. This report acknowledges the importance of the diocesan documents as a means of building constructive relationships between all stakeholders in Catholic
education to continue to spread the message of Jesus and the Gospel in the sometimes chaotic and complex world of the 21st century

8. Appendices

8.1 Report from Archdiocese of Brisbane
8.2 Report from Diocese of Cairns
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8.5 Report from Diocese of Townsville
Report on the implementation of the Defining Features of Catholic Schools

Archdiocese of Brisbane
ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE

REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEFINING FEATURES OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

This report is compiled from information provided via schools in the Archdiocese, particularly Religious Institute schools and in association with the Strategic Renewal Framework 2007-2011 for Catholic schooling in the Archdiocese of Brisbane.

The Strategic Renewal Framework 2007-2011 of Brisbane Catholic Education is centred around the Archdiocesan vision of *Jesus Communion Mission* and the priorities of the Archdiocese that flow from that. The Vision Statement for Catholic Education – *Teach Challenge Transform* also builds upon this Archdiocesan Vision and is directly linked to it. On page 15 of the Strategic Renewal Framework 2007-2011 there is reference to the Defining Features of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane with particular information relating to the research project that concluded and was approved by Archbishop Bathersby in May of 2001.

Appendix 2 on page 32 on this document provides a matrix which shows the links between the Defining Features of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane and the priorities, intentions and expectations contained within the eight Catholic schooling priorities of the Strategic Renewal Framework 2007-2011.

The revised school renewal process, which is currently into its second phase, links directly to these Catholic schooling priorities. There are thirty-one components of that which enable schools to review their operations against the eight priorities.

Thus, it is abundantly clear that the schools which are directly administered and supported by Brisbane Catholic Education have directly associated their planning to the Defining Features of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane as a basis from which the eight priorities and the framework itself has emerged.

These Defining Features are referred to as follows:

- promote the dynamic vision of God’s love manifest in the life and mission of Jesus Christ
- recognise and nurture the spirituality of each person
- be a place of quality learning and teaching
- continue to act in partnership with families
- provide an authentic experience of Catholic Christian community
- be open to those who support its values
- be experienced as a community of care
Religious Institute schools which responded to the request for information have indicated clearly their connection to each of these Defining Features. Words such as the following occur against the Defining Features:

**Promote the dynamic vision of God’s love manifest in the life and mission of Jesus Christ**

- solid Religious Education program
- reflection prayers at assemblies
- reinforcement of ethos and spirituality of founder
- school values, respect, responsibility, truth, compassion, loyalty etc
- promotion of the values and the attitudes by encouraging our community to consist of staff parents and most importantly students, to live out the Gospel values.

**Recognise and nurture the spirituality of each person**

- provision of retreat programs
- regular occasions of prayer and celebration of the Eucharist
- special Feast Days
- the cultural characteristics of our ethos and charter
- emphasizing continually to the staff their vocation as teachers
- significant school celebrations
- provision of staff retreat to develop staff spirituality, theology and ecclesial knowledge and understanding; reinforcement of the charism and mission of our founding congregation
- reaffirming indigenous spirituality for our Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander students.

**Be a place of quality learning and teaching;**

- quality learning in all curriculum areas
- celebrating the academic, social cultural and spiritual areas
- resourcing professional development of staff
- policies procedures and structures that enhance learning
- ensure staff are knowledgeable in their area and they are passionate about learning
- regular appraisals of staff
- budgeting to promote learning
- opportunities for students to be engaged in school and wider community services
- encouraging and supporting the staff to continue their spiritual and theological developments
- adherence to archdiocesan policies and guidelines for all of Religious Education and study of religion programs
- providing formation opportunities for our staff in the spirituality of our religious congregation
- highlighting a spiritual element at the principal’s weekly newsletter.

**Continue to act in partnership with families**

- keeping parents informed about school happenings
meeting regularly with various family groups such as P&F, Sports sub-committee, Music Support Group, Marketing Group, School Board

regular communication and information sheets to families

well established support groups for parents for culture and sporting endeavours

orientation days and open day opportunities for families to understand school life

communication with parishes

well established parent teacher programs;

communicating student learning data to parents

supporting parents experiencing separation, illness, tragedy.

Provide an authentic experience of Catholic Christian community;

people remark “you can feel something special as soon as you walk in here”

celebrating authentic community through school community

explaining carefully the ethos of the college to enrolling families

the role of religious leaders within the school such as the APRE, Campus Minister and Service Leaning

promoting the charism of the founding Religious Institute

associating with local clergy in promoting parish participation in the life of the school

supporting church agencies such as Caritas, St Vincent de Paul and Catholic Mission

engaging students in Archdiocesan events

promoting prayer and social justice programs

promoting regular celebrations of Eucharist and Reconciliation

providing staff and student formation sessions that focus on justice, spirituality and environmental issues

promoting dialogue and continual understanding of catholicity and catholic identity.

Be open to those who support its values

communicating the experiences which articulate school values and ethos in the newsletter

work to ensure that school fee and levy policies are consistent with Catholic principles of justice equity and accessibility

striving to develop the religious life of the college in a way that recognizes the faith backgrounds of students in our community

promoting dialogue with other Catholic schools and bodies on issues relating to Catholicity and Catholic identity

engagement with the Greek Orthodox community of Brisbane from whom a number of students come

engagement with community groups in action for justice and peace

being counter-cultural when parents do not espouse the values of the Gospel

being upfront with staff students and families who are not of the Catholic faith in clearly explaining the values of the schools espouses

conducting personal interviews with all interested parents about the life and values of the college.
Be experienced as a community of care

- focusing upon Catholic agencies such as St Vincent de Paul, Project Compassion and Religious who are involved in projects such as Human Trafficking
- fulfilling the cultural characteristics of the charism of the Religious Institute
- supporting new staff to undertake the Foundations course
- promoting a strong outreach program as well supported by staff, students and the parent body; role modelling from those in authority
- promoting hospitality as one of the charisms of our founder
- pastoral care structure and program that is regularly reviewed
- policies and procedures that promote quality relationships
- always strengthen staff parent and parish community understanding
- the support of the schools identity in the role of the mission of the Church
- establishing effective procedures for resolving conflict issues; promoting community service awards
- an integrated justice and service program across the school related to age and stage of development
- pastoral care of families in need.

It is clear from the above that Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane have embraced in various ways the Defining Features that were established in the Archdiocese from the Queensland Catholic Bishop’s Research Project on Catholic schooling.

I commend this brief report to you as indicative of engagement by schools in ensuring the Defining Features remain alive in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese.

Damien F Brennan
Director
Religious Education & Curriculum Services
Archdiocese of Brisbane

13 October 2008
A Diocesan Report on
Defining Features of Catholic Schools
for the 21st Century

Diocese of Cairns
A Diocesan Report on
Defining Features of Catholic Schools for the 21st Century
- Cairns Diocese

Introduction

In 1988, as an initiative of Queensland Bishops’, extensive consultations involving participants from all sectors of Catholic Education were undertaken to research the question "What are to be the defining features of Catholic Schools in the context of the Church’s evolving mission in the world?" Parents, teachers, clergy, students, school officers and those in educational leadership from throughout the Cairns Diocese took part in this project. They recognised that while many of the features of existing Catholic schools would be carried into the future, changes to society had created new imperatives for our schools of the 21st century that demanded new responses from both those who serve in, and are served by, our schools and colleges. From these gatherings seven essential features of Catholic Schools of the future were identified together with proposals of how these features could be implemented or further strengthened in our schools.

In 2002 ‘The Defining Features Document’ formally entitled ‘Diocese of Cairns, Catholic Schools for the 21st Century’ which had been accepted and endorsed by the Bishop and Board of Governance (Education), was launched. Within it was documented that.... our schools would be characterised by their commitment to the seven defining features of

- Bringing faith and life together through the Good News of Jesus Christ
- Celebrating God’s abundant and abiding presence in all creation
- Sustaining our communities through life-giving relationships
- Welcoming all who seek to share the life of our schools
- Teaching and learning that is lifelong, vital and holistic
- Undertaking continuous self-renewal, and working as agents of change
- Building constructive covenants with our partners in education

The challenge had been the increasing need for schools to be more focused in their planning, decision making and delivery of educational services in the light of these defining features. This project presented hope from the outset that the defining features for Cairns Catholic
Education in this Diocese would be more than a reference or resource to use. Our hope is that it would become the core foundational document to inform future decision making and to guide the policy, practice and renewal at all levels throughout Catholic Education in this Diocese.

**Initiatives that have arisen from consideration of Defining Features Document**

- The launch of the Defining Features Document – 2002 provided the impetus for further action and future developments. A review of Catholic Education Services (CES) took place leading to ‘Catholic Education, a Strategic Framework - 2000’. This led to the development of the Strategic Priorities Document in 2005 and in the following year the ‘Diocesan Learning Framework – 2006’. These living documents each with its own specific focus and purpose, fitted together as an integrated whole while relating back to the overarching vision of the defining features.

- Drawing on the seven defining features, ten strategic priorities were identified to conceptualise the defining features in a practical manner combined with a vision of a long-term future for our schools, staff and students. These priorities outlined in the Strategic Priorities document were further simplified into intentions and expectations (e.g. see [P] and [E] below). They provided a means of focusing the spotlight on those things that are most important to us in ensuring that Catholic Schools remain true to the mission objective of spreading the Gospel message and provide high quality educational experiences for students. Thus it was that schools of the Diocese in partnership with CES committed to providing a quality education for their students by developing annual goals and strategies which:

  - Enrich and promote our Catholic identity, tradition and ethos
    - [P1.1 Ensure a high level of integration of Catholic values in curricula and school culture]
    - [E1.1 All schools are places of prayer and reflection, which invest in sacred space, sacred time and opportunities for staff to spiritually renew themselves] etc
  - Enhance the quality of Religious Education and Faith Formation
  - Maximise student learning through the provision of high quality teaching and curricula
  - Address the diverse needs of students through a culture of inclusiveness
  - Enhance the personal, professional, spiritual and technological development of staff
  - Strengthen the capacity for effective, life-giving relationships and collaboration involving staff, parents, students, clergy, religious and the wider community
  - Use existing and emerging information and communication technologies to enhance learning opportunities and administrative practices
- Ensure the efficient and equitable distribution of available resources
- Implement rigorous renewal and planning practices at individual, school and system level
- Implement accountability practices at individual, school and system level to monitor quality and standards, and to achieve responsible stewardship.

- The Diocesan Learning Framework officially launched in February 2007, provided a core resource of key elements for schools to develop their own curriculum framework encompassing the learning needs of all within their own learning community. A team of teachers, Principals and CES staff have worked on the Learning Framework following a consultation process. The output of their efforts is a document that describes the key elements that should inform curriculum planning and decision-making in our schools, along with the delivery and evaluation of curriculum in classrooms across the Diocese. It is aligned with the Strategic Priorities 2005-2009 and hence the Defining Features. It articulates roles for lifelong learning. In its approach to planning, teaching, assessment, evaluation and reporting, it is supported by and in turn supports many other elements within Catholic Education in the Diocese of Cairns. These include
  - Catholic Education, Diocese of Cairns, Strategic Framework
  - Strategic Priorities for Catholic Schools
  - Consistency of Teacher Judgment Processes
  - The Religious Education outcomes

- Education is characterized by the need to plan, to continually review what is happening and complete the cycle by exploring the effectiveness of the plan. The context that would ensure that in the Cairns Diocese a renewal cycle of review and reflection would support continuous improvement of the education process at every level was based on the ten strategic priorities together with the local school needs. By addressing these it ensured that the Defining Features underpinned the renewal processes and consequent goals that emanated from each journey of renewal.

- The same document of strategic priorities presented a framework of considerable assistance to individual teachers and other staff members. They are encouraged to read the document carefully, reflect on its impact individually and in groups within their school and make individual decisions about how to make these priorities become the lived reality in their classrooms and in their schools overall. School and classroom plans both long and short-term have been developed with documented links to the specific priorities.
In a similar fashion the CES Office developed the document ‘CES Goals for 2008/2009’. This paper presented goals linked to these priorities which were used as guiding goals for the formulation of the 2008 CES budget. With 2010 as the planned year of review for this document and also that of the Strategic Priorities document it is expected that the outcome will be an updated set of priorities and goals for the following five years. Similarly CES service teams goals have been linked to the Strategic Priorities and in turn the Defining Features.

The seven Defining Features have become a key focus for CES and School induction programs, teacher induction programs and Board membership training.

Across a number of schools the defining features have been individually selected as the theme for school and staff prayer, staff meetings, and liturgies. One school used it as a basis of engaging with local indigenous community. The same Principal chose to use the Defining Features as the key topic in his talk to the Catholic Men’s group in the region.

Promotional materials aimed at the wider community describe how our schools are united and defined by their commitment to the defining features while others display an explanation of our purpose in providing education underpinned by our Catholic Faith and identity.

It is intended that other planning and policy documents developed will link to one or more of the core documents originally derived from the Defining Features. Early this year recognising that teaching and learning is lifelong, vital and holistic, the CES Services Team was reorganised to provide that focus for learning and teaching in the Diocese. The document, ‘Stewardship – Pastoral and Organisational Framework’ succinctly outlines the foundations that underpin the ministry of CES and provide a guide to the provision of services and associated stewardship within the overall life of the diocesan church. Also currently under development is the Diocesan ‘Digital Learning Programmes and Strategies for 2008 and beyond’ clearly outlining the majority of Strategic Priority intentions and expectations associated with their suggested strategies. Here a concern has been raised about incorporating a faith perspective to ITC.

With reference to “Welcoming all who seek to share the life of our schools” there has been a significant increase in support staff within CES Student Services to assist parents and schools to be inclusive of students with disabilities and our indigenous students.
The Defining Features were a fundamental part of the Executive Director and Vicar of Education’s presentation to the Synod held in the Diocese in May.
Our Diocesan Renewal Working Model

Renewal Plan

Next Cycle

Individual
Office teams
Board of Governance

CES

Operational
Development

Stewardship
Gops identified
Learning Framework

Curriculum - Learning with

Defining Features of School Communities

Strategic Priorities

Gaps Identified

School Communities

School Renewal Plan

Individual PD Goals
School Plans
Parent Groups
Areas of Challenge

- A review of the language used was proposed by a number of Principals. Expressing or translating the Defining Features to parents, staff and the wider community often bore little relevance as regrettably many members and affiliates with the school are less and less ‘churched’. Thus there is a need to find more constructive ways to increase the significance of ‘faith and life being one’. For many of our parents their connection with ‘church’ is the school and its faith and religious dimension.

Possible actions to make the language and concepts of the Defining Features accessible to all include:

- Working with Principals/Leadership Teams and their Parish Priest to unpack the Defining Features and how they might be better used by our communities.
- Providing a copy of all of the foundational documents in one display folder for Principals/Admin Teams and Parish Priests to make explicit the links
- Declaring 2009 the year of the Defining Features with each of the 7 Defining Features being the focus of every school community in the Diocese led by the Executive Director through his weekly newsletter
- Aligning all planning documents to the Defining Features including School Renewal Plans, Annual Renewal Plans, Principal/Admin Team Annual Goals and Teacher’s Annual Goals

- Many schools see the on going collaboration between pastors and the other members of the school community as needing to be explored. A suggestion was made that more opportunities be created to actively involve clergy and religious in the spiritual development of staff, students and other members of the school and wider community. At the same time complexities due to the diminishing number of clergy, their current workload and increasing age may compound the issues.

Possible actions to meet this challenge include:

- Planning regular meetings of Parish Priests and School Principals/Administration Teams to discuss ways of making the Defining Features a lived document at the local level
- Explore ways of involving local clergy in the spiritual and ecclesial development of staff based on the Defining Features
What needs to go beyond the Defining Features!

- While much has been achieved through the translation of the Defining Features and related documents into action by CES and schools, the challenge of a more active participation by the wider diversity of school communities including parishes, boards and parent groups could be further addressed.

- It has been generally agreed that the Defining Features have been well developed and underpin the majority of the decision making processes in the work of the Office and that of schools. However more research and investigation of practical ways these features could be further implemented or strengthened in our schools communities invites investigation. There is a need to look beyond the immediate school environment into the wider community for constructive partnerships and more practical support to families which would enhance the educational work, but especially the pastoral and spiritual work of our schools.

- Perhaps our “Defining Features” documentation ought to be prominent in our negotiation with government concerning the implementation of their policy within Catholic schools. For example when the Queensland College of Teachers seeks to implement Professional Development requirements for our staff, we seek to have these Defining Features accepted as the basis for what we provide to staff.

The “Defining Features” are a foundational document for Catholic Schools across the five Dioceses of Queensland. Perhaps now is the time to acknowledge their status and re-name them so that their title more fully suggests their foundational significance for their whole intended audience which includes Pastors, Principals/Leadership Teams, school staff, parents students, and members of the wider community. Let’s continue to “build constructive covenants with all partners” as we do so.
A REPORT ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEFINING FEATURES
IN THE DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON
A REPORT ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEFINING FEATURES
IN THE DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

Introduction

In 1998, the Bishops of Queensland instigated a major study into Catholic schools in the state. This study was managed by the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and involved extensive consultation across the five dioceses. The diocese of Rockhampton piloted the research process and Miss Leesa Jeffcoat lead the project with support from Miss Eileen Connor, Mrs Dianne Reardon, Dr Gayle Spry and Mr Garry Everett. Facilitators were trained and conducted focus group interviews throughout the diocese. There were 27 focus groups in the diocese and they were made up of parents, grandparents, clergy, pastoral associates, school officers, school board members, teachers, school leaders and students.

In 1999, members of a Diocesan “Think Tank” reflected on the data collected and eventually identified six defining features for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Rockhampton. They are as follows:

- Give witness to the message of Jesus and the mission of the Church
- Have a clear Catholic identity
- Be communities of care
- Offer a relevant and holistic curriculum of quality teaching and learning
- Be open and accessible to all who seek their values
- Be characterised by inclusive partnerships within a community of faith

In 2000, the Diocesan “Think Tank” submitted their material to Mr John Browning who became the writer of the draft report. After consulting the Diocesan Catholic Education Leadership Team, it was decided that the final report to be presented to the Bishop would provide an introduction to the Defining Features for Catholic Schools, a draft set of goals for Catholic schooling and suggested strategies as additional resources.

The final document, entitled “An encounter with Christ: Defining features of Catholic Schools in the 21st century” was published and launched at the Diocesan Leadership Conference in 2002.
At the end of 2007, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission proposed a project “Beyond The Defining Features” to identify what progress had been made in the implementation of Diocesan Defining Features, to prepare a summary report and to identify emerging issues for the future in relation to the Catholic identity of Catholic schools.

As nearly ten years have passed since this project commenced, it is timely to revisit the report and to reflect on progress.

**Methodology**

Each diocese decided to ask for a response to these three questions:

- **What initiatives have arisen from consideration of defining features for Catholic schools contained in the diocesan report of the Bishops Project Catholic Schools for the 21st Century?**
- **Which of the defining features have been the most challenging and why is this so?**
- **In the light of the above experiences, what issues /activities ‘beyond defining features’ need to be addressed to create Catholic schools for the future?**

The diocesan members of the Project Reference Group, Di-Anne Rowan and Neil McDonald consulted the Director of Catholic Education, Miss Leesa Jeffcoat, members of the Diocesan Catholic Education Leadership Team, other consultants at the Diocesan Office and some of the original members of the Diocesan project group. They also invited responses from principals, APREs and representatives of school boards.

**Initiatives**

The following list is a sample of the responses received. It is impossible to identify all the initiatives that have occurred as a result of the Defining Features.

- In their induction package, all new staff members at DCEO are provided with a copy of the Defining Features and these are explored further in later meetings.

- Some schools have developed a comprehensive staff information folder that includes documents about teaching in the diocese, and the defining features are part of this.

- All application packages for principals and all senior leadership roles contain information about the defining features to assist them in identifying the strategic directions for Catholic Education in the Diocese.

- Marketing material eg banners, advertisements etc has been developed specifically to incorporate the defining features.
- The Defining Features were the foundation for Strategic Planning and underpinned the identification of Key Result Areas as well as goals and strategies.

- In 2003, the Diocesan Learning Framework was developed and shaped by the Defining Features.

- School Curriculum frameworks were subsequently influenced by the Defining Features.

- Both of these frameworks have helped Catholic Education in the diocese to articulate the values that were referred to in the Defining Features but were not elaborated in any detail.

- The processes of School Renewal (School Review and Improvement) were revised in the light of the Defining Features. They were used as part of the orientation and review phases. They have also helped us to develop surveys and questionnaires.

- Inservices for new teachers have featured the Defining Features.

- One school is planning a staff development day on the topic ‘How Catholic is Our School?’ this year. The Defining Features will form a key element of that process.

- The themes for Bishop’s Inservice Days have reflected the Defining Features and workshops have been offered at these days to focus specifically on the defining features.

- Diocesan Catholic Education offered scholarships to encourage more teachers to complete study in the areas of Religious Education and Leadership to ensure we were able to provide relevant and quality teaching and learning.

- Other resources have been provided to ensure that Catholic Education offers a relevant and holistic curriculum of quality teaching and learning eg learning management system, laptops for teachers, improved student computer access.

- Diocesan Catholic Education produced a policy and statement on “Inclusive Practice” that was inspired by the Defining Features and their emphasis on openness, accessibility and inclusive practices.

- The Harmony in Between program has been revised and updated. The program is focused on presenting Indigenous Perspectives to all learners in our diocese.

- The Defining Features provided excellent reflection material for School Boards. They provided an excellent definition of identity and purpose and caused considerable discussion at Board meetings. They have provided direction as well as challenges.
• School boards have used the Defining Features as a sort of reference point for some policy work eg enrolment policy, pastoral care policy. The Defining Features were also used when school boards were asked to develop a Statement of Special Religious Character of their school for inclusion in their Board Constitution. Amongst other things, the question was posed - how are the defining features expressed in the life of your school.

• They were helpful at P & F and Board forums to provide a focus.

• The Defining Features helped principals to think deeply about the mission of Catholic schools. They gave them confidence as principals that they were continuing in the mission of Jesus.

• There has been a renewed focus on student social action as part of the development of communities of care eg Edmund Rice camps, WYD activities.

• Capital planning has used demographic data and recognised the need to provide more places in Catholic schools in the diocese after taking into account the reality of a changing mission.

The most challenging defining features

From all the feedback we received, the consensus was that there were three defining features that were very important but also very challenging. These were

• Give witness to the message of Jesus and the mission of the Church
• Have a clear Catholic identity and
• Be open and accessible to all who seek their values

There are many different ideas about what it means to be a Catholic School today. This is especially challenging in the 21st century post-modern world and in a culture of increasing secularisation in western societies. Catholic schools are very popular with parents and the wider community but it may be for the wrong reasons.

There can be disagreement between the leaders of Catholic schools and members of clergy about the purpose or mission of Catholic schools today. One of the main points to clarify is the understanding of the ecclesial nature of the Catholic school. Official Church documents offer one valuable perspective however Catholic schools in Australia today are very different institutions from those in the past and we face many different expectations because of the communities and society in which we currently operate.

The diversity of the student population and increasingly the teacher population (and before long the school leadership teams) means that having a well articulated and grassroots understanding of what "a clear Catholic identity" is becomes increasingly difficult. Catholic schools are attempting to shape an
identity that is faithful to the Catholic Church but also connects meaningfully with the lives and experience of the families they serve. This is a confronting exercise because it demands new thinking, questioning and imagination to clarify the mission of our Catholic schools. Some are not open to or receptive of such dialogue. It also reinforces the critical role of leadership in Catholic schools.

The school and the Church need to work together and foster good relationships that are highly visible but this is quite challenging given the shrinking number of priests. Trying to help people to understand the mission of the Church today can be very difficult. The vast majority of the Catholic families at Catholic schools as well as a substantial number of staff have no experience of or interest in parish life as it is currently offered and expressed. Many schools struggle to provide sacramental experiences for their students and they have little meaningful connection with parish communities. This also highlights the challenge of creating “inclusive partnerships” and the specific ways that we can achieve this.

The question of being “open and accessible” obviously has both legal and practical implications. It brings into focus a plethora of philosophical and practical challenges and, obviously, generates a great diversity in viewpoints.

This issue is difficult for schools as they are relying on an interview process and some parents are not always looking for a Catholic Education but a cheap private education whilst others (mainly poorer families) would like to be at Catholic Schools but often aren’t aware of avenues which allow them to attend e.g. fee relief etc.

Another respondent stated that if we were honest, all the defining features are challenging because if addressed properly, they challenge our current ways of acting and thinking.

**Issues and activities that need to be addressed to create Catholic schools for the future**

- The defining features need to be a key focus that is engaged with seriously by staff and parents, unpacked, given their particular local interpretation, and used as a touchstone and guide for practice at diocesan, district, and school level. We need a concerted effort to have school communities engage with the richness of the text that was produced, and a strong commitment to the Defining Features being a foundational document that would be used for Catholic Education reflection, evaluation and planning into the future.

- We need to examine again what does make us “Catholic” and be able to articulate it. Using the Defining Features to create strong and authentic Catholic schools for the future will provide the key to what we need.
• We need to give staff formation a massive priority and commitment so that they can have a serious engagement with the Defining Features.

• Perhaps the Defining Features might need to be presented in a variety of new ways (or frameworks) so that people at all levels engage with the issues of Catholic school identity that are raised by them.

• We need to explore ways of encouraging youth to become actively involved in the Church and to identify modes of prayer, praise and worship for youth that are culturally relevant but still recognize our traditions.

• What opportunities are there for youth to be involved in practical community care and responsible social action?

• How do we respond to the impact of technology on curriculum delivery?

How do we respond to the question of sustainability and the challenges posed by the environment?

Conclusion

It has been very valuable to revisit this project and reflect on what has been accomplished. We thank all who contributed to this document. We look forward to hearing the insights from other dioceses and learning from them.

The overwhelming impression is that we do not need to go “beyond” the defining features rather we need to honour the wisdom and insights highlighted in that project and keep the defining features in the foreground of what we are trying to accomplish in Catholic Schools in Queensland today.
A Diocesan Report on the Implementation of the Defining Features:

“Voices Empowered by the Spirit” (Acts 2:4)

Diocese of Toowoomba

Introduction and Context:
The publication of “Voices” in July, 2001 brought to a conclusion the Bishops’ research project which attempted to define the features of Catholic Schools into the Twenty-First Century in the Diocese of Toowoomba.

The introduction to the document, quotes the involvement of students, parents, clergy, religious, Catholic educators and others which was gathered and integrated with an array of information from invited submissions and published literature. (Voices, p5).

There were two occasions on which large groups of the above stakeholders were gathered to discuss the emerging themes of the project. One group was organized in Roma and another in Toowoomba.

Following ‘think tank’ discussions in Toowoomba, the Director at that time, Dr Bill Sultmann collated and authored the final document. This document included strategies for implementation as well as a rationale for each defining feature.

The report of progress below was gathered by group discussion at the Catholic Education Office and Principal meeting recently.

Description of progress in relation to implementation:

**Catholic Education Office:**

*Strategic and Annual planning: The defining features have been integrated into planning at the level of research which occurs as part of the overall strategic planning process. The finalized documents have not been produced with the defining features as headings or themes although it is possible to identify the defining features in the material.*

*Each year the theme for the year has been based on a defining feature in rotation. In 2008, the theme is “Attentiveness to the Life-Giving Presence of God”. This theme is printed on Catholic Education Office communications.*

*The theme will also be used for Bishop’s Inservice Days during Catholic Education week. The professional development organized for the days in the western schools and in Toowoomba will revolve around some aspect of*
the defining feature for the year and guest speakers will be chosen with the defining feature in mind.

*Conferences for Principals will also reflect the theme if possible. This year, the Principals’ Conference will focus on how we communicate and market our vision and mission – how do we encourage ‘attentiveness to the life-giving presence of God’? The defining features are not limiting. They can be expanded to highlight many aspects of school and diocesan planning.

*Inclusive Education Committee: Involvement of capital, curriculum, special education and finance staff as well Principals and Senior Education Officers has been recommended as an outcome of a review of special education conducted in the Diocese in 2007. This committee has been renamed ‘Inclusive Education’ (previously Equity) to promote the concept of inclusion and to facilitate communication between the various role holders who work in schools to promote this aim. It is the only committee that includes all sections of the office apart from the Leadership Team who meet to lead and manage the whole of the office.

*Recruitment of new staff: The “Voices” document is used in recruiting new graduates and at induction for staff new to the Catholic Education Office. It is sent out in packages in response to enquiries about positions.

*Where possible, prayers chosen for meetings reflect the theme for the year.

*Videoconferencing supports the inclusion of far western staff in meetings and inservice, thereby responding to the defining feature of inclusion and outreach.

*Some CEO staff roles have been created to better provide support to schools in working towards the ideal statements. One example is the role of Education Officer: English as a Second Language which had previously been a part time appointment was upgraded to a full time Education Officer position because of the impact of new overseas students in our schools.

**Schools:**

*Schools use the defining features as headings in their School Development Planning and renewal work. Those schools implementing the “IDEAS” process promoted by the University of Southern Qld as their renewal programme include the faith education component of the defining features to ensure alignment with the vision and mission of Catholic Education.

*Because the School Development Planning is based on the defining features, strategies included in the planning incorporate some of those listed in the “Voices” document. This ensures that all our schools are moving towards a future envisioned by the project.
*The “Voices” materials are used for induction of new staff and parents, P & F information nights and commissioning rituals. It is also used to underpin the Vision and Mission Statement of some schools.

*One of our schools has represented each defining feature in large photos which have been placed on the outside walls of the school as a continuing reminder of what the school is developing.

*APRE and school appraisals have necessitated reflection on practice in terms of the defining features. This reflection has provided the inspiration to ‘be’ and ‘do’ in partnership with the church ministry defining feature.

*"Voices” has enabled Catholic School communities to articulate who we are and what this means and looks like in practice. One Principal has responded that, “In the ‘busyness’ of the Catholic School, these defining features have provided communities with tools with which to critique policy, practice and relationships, prompting a return to these central features. This has led to greater accountability, inclusion, inward and outward looking agencies of ministry, and just policies. We are journeying together towards the dream”.

*Another Principal says, “I have used the document in weekly newsletters over the past 2 years to remind parents of the defining features and ask them to reflect on the role of the Catholic School.”

*One school uses the defining feature for the year to target a project eg for Community of Care a Peace Garden was built to identify the spirit of care in the school. The garden has plaques reminding the school community of those who have gone before them and is a shady, restful haven in which to read or reflect.

*School Board formation is also supported by the use of “Voices”. One of the Principals mentioned that people are generally becoming more familiar with the material.

**Catholic Education Board:**

*  As part of its policy making role, the Board has issued policies which assist schools in implementing strategies suggested in “Voices”. To encourage an “Inclusive and Outreaching Culture” the Board has issued a policy on “Education of the Marginalised”. In the document, “Voices”, (p16), this policy direction is supported in the following quote: “The inclusive model of education is the paradigm which the Catholic School embraces. ……. Inclusivity requires that the operation of Catholic schools be flexible to meet changing needs.” Also, “Strategy 3 states: Future planning will recognize the need to provide facilities and resources that allow schools to be more inclusive. (p17)

Other policies which support the defining features research and have been issued to date are: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Education, School Renewal, School Board, The Pastor and the Parish School, Early Years’ Policy, Education of the Marginalised in Catholic Schools, Religious Education and Faith Education in Catholic Schools, Pastoral Care, Child and Youth Protection and Enrolment in Catholic Schools. Although some
of these policies had originally been written before the publication of the defining features, their on-going review and promulgation highlights the implementation of the strategies for the defining features.

**Which of the defining features have been the most challenging and why is this so?**

Several schools indicated that “Ministry within the Church” has been difficult. As Parish Priests are becoming fewer and geographically further apart, Principals find it difficult to explain the place of the modern school within the Church – their opportunities with dialogue with their Parish Priests or Pastoral Associates is becoming limited. Some find it challenging to encourage appropriate levels of participation in the life of the Parish. Also, “Attentiveness to the Life-Giving Presence of God” is difficult for some to bring to life in the day to day management of the school. One person commented that the ‘busyness’ of school or office life means that time to reflect and be attentive to God’s presence may not occur and thus a dependence on the individual’s resources happens instead of a relationship with God being enriched.

Growth, change and empowerment are a gradual process of ongoing building up and breaking down. Trust needs to be built up. Two way dialogue, learning and understanding need time to develop and hence when Church personnel change or become overburdened themselves it is difficult to align thinking about the future around the feature of Ministry Within the Church. (Response from a Principal of a small rural school).

The inclusive nature of schools today creates funding difficulties in our schools and thus the feature concerned with creating inclusive and outreaching cultures can be difficult – finance for personnel to assist students requiring care and professional development for staff to improve skills is expensive.

The great deal of change which has emerged in education in general has impacted on our schools as places of learning. Educational vision has been impacted and limited by these government changes and expectations.

Some ideas for the future:

Currently we are producing a new strategic plan for education in the Diocese. Given the research completed with stakeholders it is clear that there are about six main themes emerging. Having briefly reviewed the implementation of the defining features to this point, to ensure that our new strategic plan has taken the defining features into account we may need to set a task for the Leadership Team to consider whether we are continuing to enhance and enrich what has already been put before us as the challenges for education into the future of this century.

No planning should be set in stone – there needs to be flexibility in it so that we can continue to build on what has been achieved and at the same time innovate where we need to do so. Perhaps each year, we should help Principals examine what is/has been happening at their schools and generate some strategies of support to them in implementing the
features. So far, there has been a great deal of good will from Principals and there is a clear understanding that the defining features are important. I am questioning whether we, as an office, direct enough support to the leaders in our schools to achieve the directions in our document.

It might be worthwhile setting the defining features themes for Principal meetings where there could be greater sharing of successful strategies. I am not sure if there is any significant attention being given to the strategies for implementation. Although we explore and expand the features each year, we haven’t spent any time really examining whether the strategies are happening. Although it was intended that the strategies would be suggestions only they should help school personnel writing development or annual plans.

There may be areas in which policy development or professional development should be occurring. Eg p12 “Voices” Strategy 4: Catholic schools will communicate their ecclesial identity and relationships to all families and students enrolling/ed at the school. How do Principals do this? We should not just assume that everyone understands what this means and that all Principals know how to do it. Interestingly, schools as ecclesial identities has emerged a theme in our current strategic plan!

Overall, it might be worthwhile to coordinate what is happening a little more to make staff aware that this material is important and that it is driving so much of what we do?

Each year it might be possible to produce a package suitable for workshopping the features and could this be used for purposes of accreditation? Perhaps a way of networking school boards would be to have a dinner with some professional development on the theme for the year.

Perhaps we should undertake a review as we are currently every five years to ensure that the material is current and appropriate for the needs of the future. One comment from a Principal who was responding to this review is worthy of note – the point was made that we need to build authentic Catholic schools, not just Catholic schools.

There is a definite challenge for some Principals to maintain and strengthen the Catholicity of the school as more parents wish to enroll students for reasons other than religious.

It was suggested that in our document some of the language could be adjusted to make it more easily readable by lay people. We need to keep revisiting and deepthing the material. We need to support the faith journeys of all our staff and start everything we do with prayer. Linking of the school with the parish should be happening in a more meaningful way in the light of fewer religious in our schools/parishes. More directed professional development in spirituality. We need to address the changing nature of the school population.
Conclusion:

“If the ‘Voices’ that contributed to this process are any indication, the future of the Catholic school is assured, as the Spirit that has breathed life into its past is the same Spirit that sustains its present and empowers its future”. (Voices, p20). It was encouraging to read the responses and the enthusiasm that exists in our Diocese for the defining features. This brief review has highlighted some directions for the future which will only serve to enhance what we all do to develop authentic Catholic schools.

Margaret Hendriks,
Assistant Director: Staff and School Development.

Catholic Education Office Toowoomba. 9th May, 2008.
REPORT ON AN EVALUATION
OF THE IMPACT OF
THE DEFINING FEATURES PROJECT
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As part of the original project, the Diocese of Townsville identified seven defining features that were to be used as a future, focussing vision to guide our Catholic schools. After a thorough discernment process it was concluded that a Catholic school of the future in the Diocese of Townsville would:

**DF1** Have a consistent commitment to Gospel values.

**DF2** Play an integral role in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

**DF3** Model God’s love for all by being a renewing community where all are valued, and empowered.

**DF4** Be staffed by qualified, competent people who give witness to Gospel values.

**DF5** Be communities of learning that provide quality, relevant, holistic education.

**DF6** Be sacred places where the spiritual life is nurtured.

**DF7** Be welcoming and open to all who seek a Catholic education.

A review of the impact of the defining features has been conducted this year by considering: (i) what initiatives have arisen from the defining features, (ii) what challenges have presented through implementing the defining features; and (iii) what ‘new’ issues have emerged beyond the defining features?

The review process conducted in our diocese included:

1. Using the initial report, members of the TCEO Executive Leadership Team undertook a discernment process to draft answers to the three questions for each Defining Feature. Each group drafting the review had at least one member of the original focus groups that assisted in the generation of the original set of defining features and each group drafted responses for two defining features.
2. The feedback from #1 was collated and a second generation draft report was completed and once again was reviewed by the members of the TCEO Executive Leadership Team.
3. A final draft was then generated from #2 feedback and a Draft Report set out under the three question headers was sent out to the TCEO school and
parish communities for comment. Responses were invited from schools, P & Fs and parishes.

4. Responses to the survey were collated and elements of the report that had at least 60% agreement were included in the final draft report.

5. The final draft report was then given to several members of the original diocesan Defining Features Project Team for comment.

6. The following final report is now forwarded as a comment of the impact of the Defining Features Project on schools in the Diocese of Townsville.

In a number of instances, there was uncertainty as to the role the Defining Features Project played in the introduction of some new initiative or the enhancement of some existing practice. In such instances, the benefit of the doubt was given to the project and the aspect was included. Without doubt, the impact of the Defining Features Project within the Diocese of Townsville has been significant.

Following is an executive summary and as such only includes the essential elements of the report. Such a structure has been utilised to keep our report brief, however more detail could be provided if requested. For example, only those comments that had at least 60% agreement are included. If 50% agreement were taken as the benchmark for inclusion, the number of inclusions would significantly increase. Also, a number of ‘one-off’ suggestions did emerge through the wider community feedback and while these are not included in the report they will be considered at the local level for inclusion in a more detailed report within our diocese.

Each listed comment under each question header is cross-referenced to the Defining Feature to which it is related. The first number indicates to which Defining Feature the comment relates; e.g. #3.10 relates to Defining Feature 3.

A. What initiatives have arisen from consideration of the defining features?

1.1 There is strong evidence that our students are challenged to reform social structures and through their actions many do reach out to others.

1.2 When employing and forming staff, ‘Gospel’ values are clearly articulated and the expectation is made known that these values are to be lived and supported.

1.3 Our schools actively espouse Gospel values by ensuring that the School Mission statement, handbooks, school development plans, goal statements, policies & procedures, curriculum, financial practices & decisions, inter-personal relationships & all interactions & decisions are firmly based on a foundation of justice, equity & empowerment.

1.4 Through a commitment to the Gospel values, young people in our schools are directly taught the values and principles that we as a Catholic community hold as important.

2.5 Discussion day attended by parish priests, pastoral leaders, TCEO personnel and principals in 2006 and another planned for 2008.

2.6 Educating students on social justice – promotion of, for example, Mini Vinnies.
2.7 Townsville Catholic Education Office explicitly supported ‘The Apology’ in Feb 2008.
2.8 Speakers from Project Compassion heightened awareness in schools and subsequently influenced fundraising.
3.9 Commitment to staff formation has grown greatly over the past few years.
3.10 'Staff' development/in-service has been extended to include all staff – teaching and non-teaching.
3.11 Review of school renewal process has been reviewed out of defining features project – all stakeholders have an opportunity to be involved in an ongoing process.
3.12 A greater openness to develop networks with community organizations/agencies, action and outreach, e.g. Mini Vinnies.
3.13 A developing awareness and promotion of ecological responsibility, e.g. Environmental Audit, On Holy Ground.
3.14 Formation opportunities (e.g. conferences) for School Boards and P&Fs.
4.15 Provision of appropriate professional development, e.g. July Professional Development Days.
4.16 Provision of practical assistance and support so that staff have the opportunity to acquire a Religious Education qualification i.e. Certificate/Grad Dip/Masters in Religious Education or Masters in Educational Leadership.
4.17 Sponsorship of study; provision of study leave, guest speakers, in-service programs and encouraging development in specific curriculum areas.
4.18 Provision of appropriate spiritual development opportunities.
4.19 Encouraging staff to study within the Foundations program.
4.20 Conducting personal reflection days and spirituality weeks for staff development.
4.21 Providing for the professional development needs of school support staff.
4.22 Provision of practical assistance in times of stress and concern.
4.23 Recognition and acceptance that as much as staff are members of the school community, they are also members of the wider community and therefore have responsibilities and life experiences that can complement the Catholic school.
4.24 Optimizing effective recruitment of staff.
5.25 Educational programs which are future oriented and which enable students to acquire knowledge and skills that equip them for a technological and scientific age.
5.26 On-going revision of curriculum and subject offerings and regular in-servicing on changes in methodologies, technologies and content.
5.27 Identifying, through the School Development Plan, ongoing resource needs in the school and ensuring schools are resourced adequately to ensure the best possible educational outcomes.
5.28 Prioritising, in collaboration with individual schools, identified needs.
5.29 Injection of more resources and planning into Reflective Practice days as a valid means of encouraging dialogue amongst school staff.
5.30 Being willing to investigate and move to meet the needs on new priorities that emerge.
6.31 Extended formation and spirituality programs for teachers and school officers.
6.32 Maintaining of pupil free days for spiritual formation, e.g. accreditation to teach days.
6.33 Setting up of a Religious Education data base (new) and Religious Education resource centre.
6.34 A school sacred place where spiritual life is nurtured is part of audit and compliance requirements in the process of school renewal.
6.35 Many schools have established sacred spaces.
6.36 Greater move to prayer tables and symbols in schools.
6.37 Beginning Teacher in-service looks at what is Catholic.
6.38 Each Beginning Teacher receives a copy of The Essential Catholic Handbook.
6.39 Early Career Teachers’ spirituality in-services.
6.40 Feast/Founders’ Days are well organized and celebrated.
6.41 Bishop visits each school annually.
7.42 Development of Inclusion Policy and inclusive procedures and practices.

B. What aspects of the defining features have been the most challenging and why is this so??

2.1 ‘Evangelization’ is a continual challenge in a consumer/secular world. Evangelization and secular world views portray different scenarios of what success in life means.
2.2 Understanding the new ‘vocational’ dimension of teaching.
2.3 To make sure Jesus is central in the message from schools, e.g. through newsletters.
2.4 To make sure that evangelization has a presence in school communications, e.g. through newsletters.
4.5 Managing performance needs of beginning teachers and continuing support of all teachers and school leaders.
4.6 Ensuring that the model of professional development is effective for facilitating change to classroom practice.

C. What issues/activities/challenges ‘beyond the defining features’ need to be addressed to create better Catholic schools for the future?

1.1 School leadership needs to be further developed to ensure the commitment to Gospel values is given appropriate attention and prominence.
2.2 Using various communication media (including technology) to make the Jesus message and evangelization relevant today.
2.3 It is one of the primary missions of schools to present Jesus as the good news and use every avenue to promote evangelization with staff – newsletter, sports days, concerts, parent teacher nights.
2.4 Catholic News/Bulletin – is it reaching the appropriate wider audience? Should new/different ways be considered for communication, such as television, YouTube, Facebook?
3.5 Recapture and/or build on the foundation charism(s) in individual schools.
3.6 Explore with all stakeholders the role of Catholic education in the formation of parents/carers.
4.7 Need to broaden “qualifications” support for Religious Education/Leadership to include other areas such as: learning support, special education, Information Technology.

5.8 Do we need a person at diocesan level to write submissions for community and/or annual funding?

6.9 Further involvement of chaplains linking schools with parish and worshipping Catholic community.

6.10 Lay vocations linking students to teaching in Catholic schools.

7.11 Conversation about what makes a Catholic school Catholic - the ‘new evangelization’.

7.12 Formation of staff – deepening knowledge of what constitutes a modern Catholic school.

John O’Brien

(Co-ordinator of the report)