Catholic education in rural and remote areas in Queensland

A position statement of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission
Approved March 2010.

1. Introduction

Today humanity appears much more interactive than in the past: this shared sense of being close to one another must be transformed into true communion. The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side (Caritas In Veritate, #53).

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission recognises that building the communion of the Church includes making available appropriate educational opportunities to all Catholics in Queensland.

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission’s policy: Catholic schooling in rural and remote areas in Queensland addresses the provision of quality Catholic schooling for students whose families live in rural and remote areas.

2. Definitions

2.1 Rural and remote areas are as defined by the Australian government’s Schools Geographic Location Classification (2003).

2.2 Catholic education is experienced in a variety of settings and through various delivery modes under the auspices of the local Bishop.

3. Rationale

The educational needs of Catholic families in rural and remote Queensland present distinctive challenges (see appendix 1).

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission acknowledges that Catholic families from rural and remote areas have a right to access quality Catholic education and educational services although access to Catholic schools and other educational institutions is limited by geographical location.
The Catholic schools in rural and remote areas have particular support needs as outlined in appendix 1, 6.10.1-8. The provision of quality Catholic schooling is covered in the QCEC policy: Catholic schooling in rural and remote areas in Queensland.

4. Position Statement

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission advocates that Catholic schooling authorities seek to collaborate with the Catholic church and its agencies in providing opportunities for rural and remote communities that:

4.1 nurture catechesis and faith development
4.2 include appropriate educational programs through a variety of modes
4.3 include appropriate induction and orientation programs for personnel
4.4 provide professional development for personnel
4.5 provide both professional and personal support for those ministering within the Church
4.6 build collaborative partnerships in support of gospel imperatives in education.

5. Implications

This collaboration may take the form of:

5.1 establishing formal and informal educational programs, liturgical and theological discussion groups such as distance education courses, e-learning courses or correspondence courses
5.2 providing access to various modes of delivery
5.3 making provision for educational opportunities for families in rural and remote areas
5.4 continuing research into the development of resources and methods for providing ongoing faith education for Catholic families
5.5 training diocesan and / or parish personnel to deliver educational programs.

Appendix 1

A Document on the uniqueness of education in remote and rural areas in Queensland

People in rural areas are not one homogenous group but are as diverse as those from the rest of Australia, however, the educational needs of Catholic children in remote and rural Queensland present distinctive challenges for Catholic Education as outlined below.

a) The Commission acknowledges that the family is the basic unit of society and the foundation of its educative process. In addition, the special needs of specific cultural groups in rural communities require fostering and where possible, these needs addressed.

b) Limited access and the costs of information and communication technologies such as the internet are barriers to educational opportunities. However, technology has the potential for reducing rural and remote communities’ isolation and lack of access to information.

c) Rural and remote parents have a right to choose an appropriate education for their children. Educational services are costly and access to Catholic education is limited by geographical location. Children are often required to travel long distances or live away from home. Therefore, rural students need to be provided with quality residential education/boarding facilities appropriate to their needs. The transition to boarding has its own issues such as homesickness and specific learning needs. Often this requires special intervention such as bridging classes.
and pastoral support. Sometimes when a student goes to a boarding facility and on to further studies or work they do not return to the rural or remote community and this drains the community of its youth.

d) Life in rural and remote areas benefits greatly from close-knit communities working together for the wellbeing of everyone and can be a great source of personal strength and resilience. These qualities lend themselves to community formation and community relationships inclusive of ecumenism, affording opportunities for leadership in school, Church and the wider community. It also develops resourcefulness in living skills and an authentic spirituality born of patience and resilience.

e) Isolation exacerbates the alienation and exclusion felt by some whose beliefs are not aligned to their community. Pastoral care and confidentiality are of heightened importance for these people.

f) The educational participation and attainment for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (families) who live in rural and remote areas remains below that of other Australians due in part to chronic health, lack of access to educational institutions, financial constraints and social, cultural and language barriers (ABS, The Health and Welfare of Australia’s ATSI Peoples, 2005).

g) During times of hardship, students from rural areas may feel pressure to enter the workforce prematurely rather than complete school. There may be a diminished sense of security and optimism and high levels of anxiety. The special needs of rural families require pastoral care to be provided.

h) Availability of expertise in adult education and the cost of provision for spiritual and theological studies can be limiting factors in rural and remote areas.

i) Large distances mitigate against the access of professional development for parents and Church communities.

j) Rural and remote Catholic schools have particular issues:

  i) The low retention of staff has direct implications for the connectedness students feel both to their school and to their learning. To ensure that students and families in remote and rural areas of Queensland have access to a quality Catholic education, it is essential that Catholic education employers in Queensland are able to attract and retain suitable teachers who receive just and equitable treatment in employment conditions and support services which Church teaching requires for all employees.

  ii) The unavailability or infrequent availability of a priest impacts on the faith dimension and the liturgical life of the school (especially access to Eucharist).

  iii) There can be a lack of “expertise” in areas of faith and religious education.

  iv) The model for delivery of professional development for staff needs to take into account the availability of supply teachers and the disruption which occurs when many teachers are absent at the one time.

  v) Students in need are sometimes reluctant to seek help because of fear that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a close knit community.

  vi) There is always the requirement for the ability to offer a range of curriculum and other options to cater for the needs of students.

  vii) Access to support services and agencies and the co-ordination of educational services within rural Queensland requires promotion and enabling where appropriate.

  k) Recruitment of suitable volunteers for the provision for religious education in State Schools is difficult.
References


Benedict XVI (2009), Encyclical Letter *Caritas In Veritate*


Mindmatters (2009), *Community Matters working with diversity for wellbeing*, discussion paper.