



MEDIA RELEASE

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Diversity is the norm in Aussie classrooms

In Australian classrooms today, teachers are educating children with a diverse range of learning needs from those with a mild cognitive delay to those with a lifelong disability.

On this International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), the Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) is celebrating the diversity of 21st Century Australian classrooms and recognising the work of school communities in setting all children up for success.

CCSP Acting Executive Director, Mary Ryan, says that diversity is the norm in education settings today with mainstream schools catering to students with a range of learning needs.

“More than 18 per cent of Catholic school students in NSW require adjustments to normal day-to-day teaching to meet their educational needs.

“Classrooms and schools should represent the world in which we would like to live, which is one of inclusivity. We want our children to become adults who care about others and advocate for equity and justice and these are values they learn in classrooms and schools where they are exposed to the diversity of humanity.

“We want our children to develop a responsibility to care for others, have compassion and empathy for those around us and form friendships beyond the ‘norm’,” Mrs Ryan said.

The 2018 theme of International Day of Persons with Disabilities is ‘empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality’. Our Lady of Dolours Catholic Primary School in Chatswood is just one example of an inclusive school community that goes above and beyond to meet the needs of families seeking a Catholic education for their children, with or without additional learning needs, however mild or severe.

Principal of Our Lady of Dolours, Philip Ledlin, says that in one cohort, the school has four children with significant learning difficulties.

“As a Catholic school, we strive to be an inclusive community that responds to all families seeking a Catholic education for their child. Our aim for every student is to set them up for success and, for children who have significant learning difficulties, we work closely with the Catholic Schools Office, the families, our own teachers and external specialists to ensure the needs of each child are being met.

“When enrolling a child with ‘special’ and ‘sensitive’ learning needs, we have an extensive period of consultation where we build a close and open relationship with the family, we visit the preschool and we have trials to determine the support needed within our school setting. We make every effort to meet the specific needs of our students and, if our school setting proves not to be the best option for any one child, we go the extra mile to ensure we find a solution for the family,” Mr Ledlin said.

A mother at Our Lady of Dolours who has a child in Year 1 with challenging behaviours says that when it comes to getting the support she needs for her son, she couldn’t ask for more from the school.

“We’ve been through some rocky times in terms of behaviour with my son and the school has been incredibly supportive. My son has worked with their in-house counsellor and the school has allowed access to a range of specialists from psychologists to occupational therapists to speech pathologists to come in and work with my son. We went through one period when my son’s behaviour was particularly problematic so the school responded and ensured staff members were able to monitor him at appropriate times. Through various interventions made by the school, my son has been able to continue his education and I could not be happier in terms of the kindness, support and care expressed towards my son and our family,” she said.

ENDS

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The Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) is the peak representative body for parents with children in Catholic schools in NSW/ACT.