

## Media Release

### Supporting teachers, so that special needs students can flourish

For almost three decades, educator Christine Grima-Farrell has been passionate about helping teachers boost their skills and confidence to work with students with diagnosed disabilities.

Now, Dr Grima-Farrell will share her expertise with the Catholic education sector after winning the 2019 Brother John Taylor Fellowship, a \$20,000 research prize offered annually by Catholic Schools NSW that will enable her to study the latest special needs teaching approaches overseas.

Dr Grima-Farrell - who leads the Student Support Team in the Broken Bay Catholic Schools Office - said her research will aim to build teacher confidence and capacity to maximise engagement and success for students with special needs.

“The Fellowship will enable me to study evidence-based approaches in the US and Canada that address the strengths and needs of students, teachers and school leaders to maximise students’ potential to flourish as individuals and classroom members,” she said.

“Families and students with disabilities should have the same opportunities as others to participate in a rich school life. It is important that we work collaboratively to walk this learning pathway together.”

Dr Grima-Farrell said her research will focus on assisting teachers and school leaders to know more about how physical design and classroom adjustments can help boost students’ capacity to learn.

“Adjustments to curriculum content, processes of engagement and assessment that respond to students’ individual needs can help break down barriers and make learning accessible to all.

“These adjustments may be physical - such as installing ramps and covered walkways in schools to make them more accessible, which is beneficial for students in wheelchairs and also for deliveries and pram access.”

Catholic schools value the contributions each person makes to the school community, she said.

“I am fortunate to lead a dedicated team who work collaboratively with many stakeholders including teachers, students, families and medical practitioners to plan adjustments that break down barriers and improve access, enabling full participation in school life and experience a real sense of belonging.”

“We are navigating new territory in the disability landscape and along with challenges come great opportunities,” she said.

“The increased focus on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data provides new direction for our schools but we do need to be aware of the administrative challenges linked to the new funding structure for our teachers and school staff.”

CSNSW Director of Education Policy, Danielle Cronin, said the Brother John Taylor Fellowship gave Catholic educators an opportunity to research first-hand international, evidence-based teaching approaches that can benefit Catholic school teachers and students.

“Christine is a strong advocate for inclusion in schools and won out over a very good field,” she said.

The Fellowship honours John Taylor, a Christian Brother, and his dedication to quality education and equity over 30 years as a teacher, principal and Catholic education administrator.

Catholic Schools NSW represents the state’s 595 Catholic schools and their 255,000 students.

**Media Contact:** Jim Hanna | 0414 828 629 | [jim.hanna@csnsw.catholic.edu.au](mailto:jim.hanna@csnsw.catholic.edu.au)

# BIO

Dr Christine Grima-Farrell is an experienced teacher, special educator, teacher educator and leader who has been involved in Catholic education for over 20 years.

She currently leads the Student Support Team of the Broken Bay Catholic Schools System. She also she strives to raise awareness of ways to merge research, policy and practice to support students and enhance their learning, wellbeing and resilience through promoting collaborative partnerships.

Her role is very diverse and includes staffing, budget, assessment monitoring and approval, Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) and professional learning innovation and delivery, with a central focus on providing opportunities for all students and teachers to reach their spiritual, educational and social potential.

Dr Grima-Farrell has been commended with a NSW Premier's Teaching award for Excellence in her work in the area of Inclusive Education and Research to Practice initiatives.

Some of her practice and research interests include:

- research to practice
- inclusive education
- wellbeing
- teacher education for students with diverse learning needs and
- school transitions

## Qualifications

Doctorate of Philosophy – APA Award

Bringing inclusive research based practice to scale

*Charles Sturt University, Bathurst (awarded without changes 2012)*

Masters of Education – Inclusive Education with Distinction

*Charles Sturt University, Bathurst*

Bachelor, Education – Special Education with Distinction

*Australian Catholic University*

Diploma, Teaching – Primary with Distinction

*Catholic College of Education, North Sydney*