

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Aboriginal foundation celebrates new milestones**

A charity which aims to change the lives of Aboriginal children across Victoria recently celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and a record number of students being supported in local Catholic schools.

The number of Aboriginal students enrolled in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sale has increased by 26% in the last five years, reaching 237 in 2021. This growth has been made possible with the support of the *Opening the Doors Foundation*, and its ongoing commitment to the self-determination of Aboriginal families selecting Catholic education for their children.

Around one in three, or 36% of Aboriginal students enrolled in primary and secondary schools in the Diocese of Sale, are supported by the *Opening the Doors Foundation*.

Ms Gemma Radford, a teacher at St Mary's Primary School in Bairnsdale, said the financial support provided by the Foundation has allowed her students to thrive.

"In all aspects of their learning journey, having that support from the *Opening the Doors Foundation* means that the students can work towards their full learning potential.

"The foundation has assisted families with the purchase of school uniforms, participation in water safety events, excursions, camps, and the equipment needed for the school year. By taking the financial pressure off purchasing the essential school items, it has allowed students to participate in additional learning opportunities, which has resulted in increased attendance and their overall happiness at school," Ms Radford said.

Ms Maria Kirkwood, Director of Catholic Education, Diocese of Sale, thanked the Foundation for the continued support it provides to Aboriginal families.

"The commitment of the Foundation to supporting access to educational opportunities for Aboriginal families is to be commended. Through philanthropic donations, the Foundation is able to open the doors to students so that they can participate fully and equally in Catholic education. We look forward to a continued partnership with the Foundation, which is greatly valued by the families," she said.

*Opening the Doors Foundation* provides education resources and support to Aboriginal children and young people, ensuring the doors to Catholic and other non-Government schools are open to all Aboriginal families. It is the only Aboriginal Foundation in Victoria dedicated to supporting education for students from Foundation to Year 12. Over the last 20 years, it has provided guidance and support to more than 3,000 students and their families in their education journey, with over 10,000 grants totalling more than \$6 million.

More information about the Foundation is available on its website: [www.openingthedoors.org.au](http://www.openingthedoors.org.au)

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