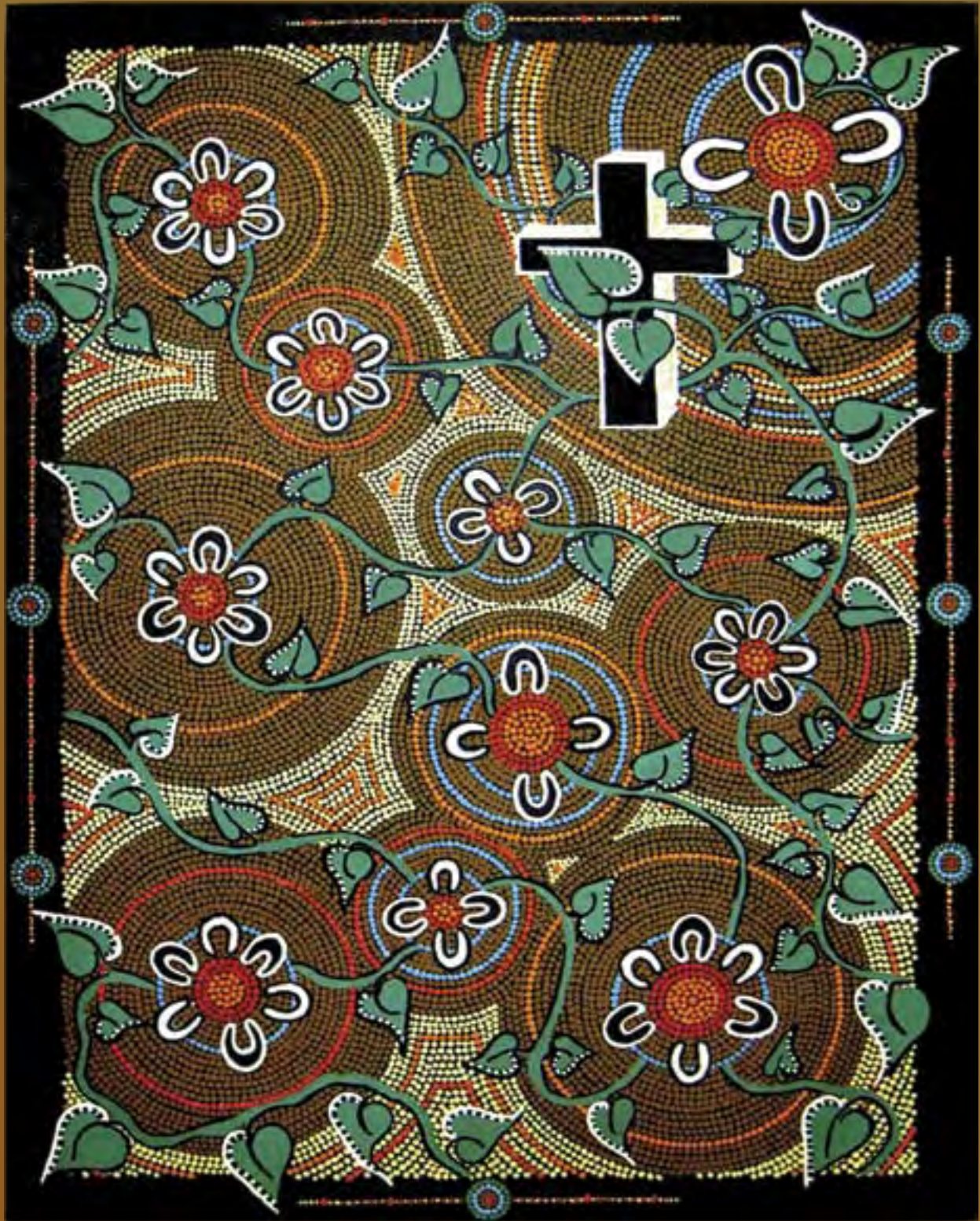


FIRESTICK





Diocese of Wagga Wagga

Vision Statement

In keeping with the evangelising Mission of the Catholic Church the Diocese of Wagga Wagga develops and affirms Catholic Schools which:

- † are committed to Jesus Christ and his Gospel;
- † know and celebrate our Catholic faith tradition;
- † educate the whole person: body, spirit, heart and mind;
- † promote education in the service of a better world;
- † provide our children with reasons for living, hoping and loving.



Mission Statement

Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Wagga Wagga are committed to being:

A Community of Faiths:

- † centred on Christ and the sacramental life of the Church
- † living Gospel values according to Church teaching
- † working to foster the growth of the Kingdom of God on Earth
- † learning about and living our Catholic Faith while respecting the faith traditions of others
- † demonstrating the relevance of faith to life and contemporary culture

A Community of Learnings:

- † helping students to find and nurture their gifts and talents
- † providing a comprehensive curriculum of quality and challenge for all
- † valuing effort, achievement and excellence in learning
- † respecting competence and dedication in the staff
- † modelling the integration of Catholic Faith and learning
- † using technology to enhance teaching and learning

A Community of Cares:

- † welcoming and including students and their families
- † respecting the dignity and uniqueness of each student
- † providing a safe, secure and stimulating environment conducive to learning
- † ensuring fairness and justice within appropriate discipline structures
- † promoting self-esteem and critical thinking in students

A Community of Services:

- † complementing and supporting the role of parents
- † working in partnership with priests and the parish and local communities
- † promoting outreach to the poor and disadvantaged
- † modelling and promoting use of each other's gifts for the benefit of society
- † encouraging an attitude of stewardship to all creation

FIRESTICK

*Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world."
(John 8:12)*



*The Diocese of Wagga Wagga acknowledges that the majority
of the land upon which it is located is Wiradjuri country.*





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Diocese of Wagga Wagga

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FIRESTICK COMMITTEE

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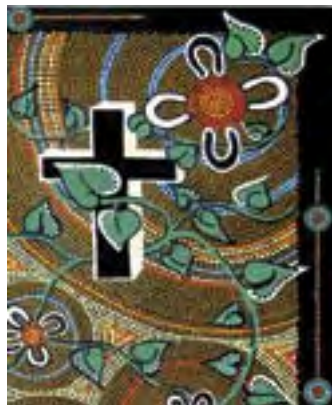
KAREN GARDINER

THERESE MCFARLANE

NATALIE NIMMO

SIMON SHIELDS

ROY THOMPSON





The purpose of this document is to provide a foundation for action aimed at recognising the place and importance of the Aboriginal members of our community.

In some way this document, as a statement, may encourage Aboriginal parents to enrol their children in Catholic schools. It will support their engagement in identifying and meeting the needs of Aboriginal students, and will require of non-Aboriginal people their proper recognition of and support for the educational aims of Aboriginal students in our Catholic schools.

The document provides a framework within which parents, clergy, principals, teachers and students may identify local priority areas and incorporate them into their School Renewal Framework and Annual Plans. This will be expected and monitored.

Careful thought and consultation with Aboriginal people has informed this document. So too has the expertise of professional educators working within the broader Educational Policy framework under the National Goals for Education, and the particular goals for education within the Indigenous Education policy of the Department of Education at the national level.

In committing to work together to address the goals, focus points and evidence guide criteria contained within, we know that it will require effort and strategic thinking.

I commend the intent of this statement to all within our community of schools. I place my thanks on record to those who have invested much time, thought, care and respect in writing the document. And I sincerely hope that we witness change and growth within our community consistent with the purpose of Firestick.



Stephen Marchant
Director of Schools
Diocese of Wagga Wagga

22 June, 2005





It is my privilege to stand with the Indigenous Education Reference Group as they present: **Firestick**.

Firestick rests on a number of priorities not the least of which seeks to involve Indigenous parents and community members in educational decision making; it acknowledges their role in establishing culturally inclusive curriculum. This is certainly fitting and appropriate when we consider the words of Pope John Paul II speaking to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Alice Springs (Nov. 1986). I quote:

“Some of the stories from your Dreamtime legends speak powerfully of the great mysteries of human life, its frailty, its need for help, its closeness to spiritual powers and the value of the human person. ... It is wonderful to see how people, as they accept the Gospel of Jesus, find points of agreement between their own traditions and those of Jesus and his people.”

Firestick is a timely document giving further expression to the stated position of the Catholic Church in Australia: to uphold the dignity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and pursue the way of reconciliation by promoting social justice. This document inherently acknowledges the value to our Australian way of life, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture; “you are part of Australia and Australia is part of you,” proclaimed Pope John Paul II speaking in Alice Springs (1986); “the church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.”

Firestick proclaims this very purpose. I thoroughly support this initiative and sincerely thank those responsible for its formative content and presentation.

+Gerard Hanna
Bishop of Wagga Wagga



FIRESTICK

Fire was and is critical in all cultures and has served many purposes since the beginning of time ... and Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12)

Firestick in traditional Aboriginal culture is a stick that is kept alight to ensure the availability of fire when needed.



Firestick must be available, maintained and kept alive, in all diocesan schools.



We recognise that the traditional nations of Australia include both Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge the importance of consulting with local Aboriginal communities when aspects of Aboriginal history and culture are being incorporated into the school curriculum.

As the majority of this Diocese is located on Wiradjuri country, the term Aboriginal will be used throughout this document.



AS PEOPLE OF GOD, WE HAVE A CALL TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Creator God is acknowledged as the source of all life on earth.

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God; he was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him nothing came to be. Whatever has come to be, found life in him, life which for humans was also light. (John 1:1-4)

We recognise that the original inhabitants of the Earth's continents have deep spiritual connection to the land and everything on it.

Spirituality is the very core of our cultural heritage. We are all created in the image of God – black, white ... This country is not two hundred years old - it is thousands of years old. Aboriginal (Australian) history is not something to be afraid of – it is something to be proud of. We should open the door of pride and close the door of fear. (Flo Grant, Wiradjuri Elder: 2003)

The challenge to all the Earth's people is expressed in the Gospel of John:

*“Now I give you a new commandment: love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another” (John 13:34)*

In 1970, when Pope Paul VI visited Australia he stated:

We know you [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples] have a lifestyle proper to your own ethnic genius or culture – a culture which the Church respects and which she does not in any way ask you to renounce... (Sydney, 1970)

The Australian Bishops' Pastoral Letters reaffirm commitment to the challenge:

The Aboriginal can make a unique contribution to our world. To allow him to do so, we will need to be more intent on listening than on talking, more concerned with respect than criticism, more willing to learn than to teach. (Australian Bishops' Pastoral letter:1980)

*We commit ourselves as a Church to influence the minds and hearts of the people of Australia to achieve justice and harmony and to uphold the dignity of the Aboriginal people.
(Australian Bishops' Pastoral Letter:1988)*

In 1996, the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) issued the following call:

We call upon the Church – her people, her leaders and her children – to listen with new ears, to see with new eyes, what always was and what always will be – to be awakened to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lifeways, cultures and spiritualities (NCEC:1996)





Many Australians have also called for commitment and unity:

Whether it is a crisis or not, we are at a crossroads and need to choose the right direction. Together, Indigenous and other Australians are called upon to choose the path we now take. Our choice will determine the future of our nation.

Patrick Dodson (Chair: Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation:1996)

I have a vision. And it is a shared vision. It is a vision put into words by the old man of the Gurindji people, Vincent Lingiari, after the soil from the heartland of the Gurindji territory had been poured into his outstretched hand. "We can go forward together as friends and equals," he said.

(Sir William Deane, GG, 30th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum Convention for Aboriginal Reconciliation: 1997)

Aboriginal education is not only the appropriate education of Aboriginal students but also must involve the education of all Australian students about Indigenous Australia.

(NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) Inc.:1995)

The Australian Catholic Church endeavours to meet the above challenges by:

- upholding the dignity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original custodians of the land;
- acknowledging and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, heritage, lifestyles, histories and spiritualities.

In 1999, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education, met as MCEETYA (the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) and endorsed a new set of National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century – The Adelaide Declaration.

The Adelaide Declaration includes the following:

Schooling should be socially just, so that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students;
- all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians;
- all students understand and acknowledge the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in the Australian community and internationally.





The New South Wales Board of Studies incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in all key learning areas.

As recommended in the K- 6 English Modules, teachers should:

... incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into planned learning activities and be aware that ... a perspective is not only concerned with content, it values the process involved in understanding and respecting, and incorporating other viewpoints (p10)

And as stated in the 7-10 English syllabus:

... students explore a range of experiences and achievements of Aboriginal peoples in historical and social contexts and the links between cultural expression, language and spirituality (p10)

Firestick is a continuation of the journey that began formally, in the schools of this Diocese during National Reconciliation Week (1996) when they gathered at Holy Trinity Primary School, Ashmont, to proclaim the following Statement of Commitment:

We, the Catholic School Community of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga, acknowledge with sorrow the profound disturbance that has occurred to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

We commit ourselves to work for reconciliation between all Australians so that, together, we can acknowledge, appreciate and understand each others' worth and culture, embrace a shared set of values and work toward a future together.

Diocese of Wagga Wagga, 1996



If Aboriginal children are to succeed in the school context then they need to know that it is safe and acceptable to move backwards and forwards between home and school cultures.

(Simpson, L. & Clancy, S.: 2001, Developing classroom discourse with young Aboriginal literacy learners. Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 26(1), pp. 1-10.)



FIRESTICK

DEBBIE BRYDON - ARTIST

Debbie is a Wiradjuri woman who grew up in Lake Cargelligo. She is a talented painter and has many skills in producing art work. She is an energetic and enthusiastic worker who has learnt many skills at TAFE through the Works Skills course. Participation in this course has encouraged her to re-establish a cottage industry of her own, producing dream catchers, lucky horse shoes, didj bags, cushion covers and art work of varying traditions.

FIRESTICK

The Elders, both Aboriginal and Christian, give us wisdom. The knowledge and wisdom flows from our Elders and guides us on our journey.

EXPLANATION OF THE FIRESTICK PAINTING

The circles represent campfires of learning – our schools. The Firestick moves from one to another, at times dimming, until it reaches the next campsite where the fire is rejuvenated.

The vine connecting the campsites symbolises the spreading of the word of the Lord and the wisdom of the Elders through education and cultural sharing.

The orange represents the flame of the Firestick.

*The blue represents water – a substance that is vital for life.
The browns represent our earth.*

The horseshoes represent the students in our schools.



THE SPIRIT OF THIS POLICY IS EXPLORED AND EXPERIENCED THROUGH FIRESTICK. A RIGOROUS ENGAGEMENT WITH FIRESTICK WILL ENHANCE THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR ALL STUDENTS.

PURPOSE

The Indigenous Education Reference Group has prepared Firestick for the Catholic Schools Office in the Diocese of Wagga Wagga. With the spirit of Reconciliation at its heart, it aims to provide guidance, support and challenge for the Catholic Schools Office, its system of schools and local Aboriginal communities.

The Vision Statement for Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Wagga Wagga commits us to Jesus Christ and his Gospel by educating the whole person in the service of a better world. As communities of Faith, Learning, Care and Service we also commit to providing our children with reasons for living, hoping and loving. We respect the dignity and uniqueness of each student and draw inspiration from the gospel values of community, service, justice and courage.

Therefore, our challenge is to enrich our communities so that all members:

- view the world as an integrated community;
- are sensitive to the needs and viewpoints of others;
- are courageous, just and honest in decision making and actions;
- commit to action and service;
- show respect for self and others;
- appreciate and value cultural diversity and individuality (Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults (TCTA) 2000).





RATIONALE

In 1995, MCEETYA established a taskforce to develop a national strategy for Indigenous Education, which highlighted ten key issues for achieving equity in education for Indigenous students.

These issues have been translated into eight priority areas:

- improving Indigenous literacy;
- improving Indigenous numeracy;
- increasing the employment of Indigenous Australians in education and training;
- improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students;
- increasing Indigenous enrolments;
- increasing the involvement of Indigenous parents/community members in educational decision making;
- increasing professional development for staff involved in Indigenous education;
- expanding culturally inclusive curricula.

In light of this, Catholic school communities continue to face the contemporary challenges of:

- presenting a respectful, comprehensive and accurate account of Australian history;
- appreciating and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, perspectives and spiritualities;
- raising consciousness of the significant issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- continuing to develop partnerships with local Aboriginal communities to bring about improvement in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- implementing the inclusion of Aboriginal Studies and perspectives across the curriculum;
- facilitating the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in decision-making at the school and system level;
- committing ourselves to work for reconciliation between all Australians.




GOALS

The goals of Firestick are to:

- improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students;
- enhance the educational outcomes of all students;
- reaffirm our commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- support the Church's commitment to Social Justice.

To achieve these goals the Catholic Schools Office and its schools will focus on the following areas:



Decision Making Evidence Guide

- Diocesan and school committees active in the decision making process;
- Parents of Aboriginal students and community members involved in educational decision making.

Professional Learning Evidence Guide

- Catholic school communities will be informed about and have knowledge of, understanding about and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contemporary and traditional cultures;
- Staff have informed and realistic expectations of all students.

Employment Evidence Guide

- Employment strategy developed and actioned;
- Increased number of Aboriginal people employed within our system.



Participation

Evidence Guide

- Increased number of Aboriginal students enrolled and retained in Diocesan schools;
- Aboriginal students actively accessing VET courses;
- Attendance rates equivalent, or better, than those of non-Aboriginal students;
- Active and proactive participation.

Student Learning

Evidence Guide

- Increased number of Aboriginal students achieving successful completion of Year 12 or its equivalent;
- Increased numbers of Aboriginal students in higher bands for BST, ELLA and SNAP;
- Aboriginal perspectives taught in all Key Learning Areas in all schools;
- Students actively engaged in the learning process.

Evangelisation

Evidence Guide

- Understanding and acceptance of Evangelisation as a key Church mandate;
- Connection between Church and the work of our schools;
- Connections between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with the Church;
- Wisdom of Church and Aboriginal spiritualities guide decision making.

EVALUATION

The Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee, or its equivalent, will evaluate this policy in 2009. The process will involve consultation with local Aboriginal communities and Diocesan educational personnel. It will focus on identifying:

- areas of progress/success;
- areas in which a refocus of energy is needed;
- factors that assisted or hindered the achievement of the goals identified in this policy.





THE STORY SO FAR ...

Firestick has been developed over a two year period. It consists of a policy statement and support materials. Members of our school communities, the Wiradjuri community and wider Aboriginal communities have been involved in the process. Firestick will be implemented over a five year period and will be reviewed during 2009.

RESOURCING

Local Aboriginal communities are an important resource for the implementation of Firestick. The wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the Aboriginal Educational Consultative Groups (AECG), the Catholic Schools Office and government agencies also provide informed perspectives and can be accessed by schools.

Support materials will be issued to assist schools in implementing Firestick. These support materials will address issues such as:



LOCAL HISTORY, TRADITIONS AND LANGUAGES

RECONCILIATION – CULTURAL AWARENESS

TRADITIONAL SPIRITUALITIES

TEACHING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

CHOOSING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE RESOURCES



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