

Parents as First Educators in the Global Village

By Tony O'Byrne, Chair of Catholic School Parents Australia

The history of Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) is relatively short however the story of parents and Catholic education in Australia goes back nearly 200 years to 1820 with the opening of the first Catholic school in Parramatta. Formed in late 2013, CSPA has quickly established itself as the national body for parents-carers with children in the 1740 Catholic schools across Australia. Now, more so than ever, it takes the whole global village to educate the child, and with great pride and responsibility parents are 'the first and most important educators of their own children' (Pope John Paul II, 1994).

Driven by our core values of *Integrity, Respect, Faith and Inclusivity*, CSPA supports and celebrates the holistic education (cognitive, social, physical, ethical and spiritual) offered to students in Catholic schools.

What does CSPA do?

Catholic School Parents Australia:

- Advocates for families with children and young people in Australian Catholic schools;
- Represents these families to

education authorities such as NCEC and ACARA and governments;

- Supports and provides national leadership to the State and Territory parent bodies working with Catholic schools;
- Works with such agencies as the Australian government and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) to support, explore and promote Parent Engagement as an influence on student learning; and
- Collaborates with the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) in all matters pertaining to parents as partners in Catholic education.

Currently, a key undertaking of CSPA is the exploration of Parent Engagement practices in schools across all school sectors nationwide. Working in partnership with the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) and ARACY, CSPA has used funding from the Australian Government's Department of Education and Training (DET) to survey and interview principals and interview parents about Parent

Engagement. A key outcome of this research will be, during 2018, the generation of tool kits outlining for principals, teachers and parents – carers, contemporary Parent Engagement strategies that enhance student learning and well-being.

CSPA is keen to get this right as respected research has shown that when parents engage in their children's learning, they develop a stronger belief in education (Pushor, 2007) and their children are likely to:

- achieve higher grades;
- stay at school longer;
- develop better social skills;
- have improved behaviour;
- graduate successfully; and
- transition to post-secondary education.

(Emerson, *Fear, Fox and Sanders*, 2012).

If undertaken effectively, Parent Engagement can be a cost effective way for not only a parent – carer to improve their child's learning and well-being, but also for the globally connected village of Australia to assist their students in stepping up to another level of performance.



Tony O'Byrne is the inaugural Chair of CSPA, a position he has held since 2013. Tony was principal of Aquinas College at Ringwood for 25 years up until 2013. Tony's three children were educated in Catholic schools and he currently works for Melbourne Catholic Education.

Catholic School Parents Australia is recognised by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education as the national body representing and advocating for the parents and carers of over 765,000 children and young people who attend the 1738 Catholic schools

across Australia. CSPA works in collaboration and consultation with the National Catholic Education Commission.

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) was formed by the State and Territory Catholic school parent bodies of: ACT, NSW, QLD, SA, Tasmania, Victoria and WA.

8 TIPS TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING AND WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL



1

MEET AND CONNECT WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER(S) EARLY IN THE SCHOOL YEAR.

2

STAY UP TO DATE WITH WHAT YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING AT SCHOOL AND TALK WITH THEM ABOUT IT.

3

PARTICIPATE IN OPPORTUNITIES AT SCHOOL TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING.

4

READ TO YOUR CHILD EVERY DAY AND SHARE THE JOY OF LEARNING THROUGH WORDS, RHYMES AND STORIES.

5

SHARE IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CHILD WITH THEIR TEACHER(S) AND THE SCHOOL.

6

ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT YOUR CHILD TO DO THEIR VERY BEST BOTH IN THEIR LEARNING AND BEHAVIOUR – HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.

7

READ THE SCHOOL NEWSLETTER AND KEEP UP TO DATE WITH SCHOOL HAPPENINGS.

8

ACCESS INFORMATION TO BE INFORMED ABOUT YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE'S SENIOR SCHOOL ASSESSMENT AND TRANSITIONS FROM SCHOOL.