



# Annual Report

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Catholic Schools Office  
Diocese of Armidale





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## *Bishop Kennedy's Message*

Reflecting on our schools and school system in 2020, the first thing that comes to me is immense gratitude to teachers, students, parents and all those involved in our schools. In 2020 the Coronavirus pandemic and associated measures presented challenges for you that were unprecedented, and your capacity to meet those challenges was outstanding. Thank you!

Also in 2020, I established a new governing body for our system of schools: The Armidale Catholic Schools Council (ACSC). This Council replaced the previous advisory body, the Bishop's Commission for Catholic Schools. Establishing the ACSC is part of a wider review of reform of governance I am undertaking across all Diocesan agencies and organisations. The ACSC will work collaboratively with me and the Director of Catholic Schools for the good of the Diocesan system of schools. It shares with me responsibility for governance. One of my instructions to the Council members is that the Council is to 'pursue excellence in governance which meets all statutory/legal requirements; is fit for purpose; and adopts best practice in all areas.'

"The Church has in a special way the duty and the right of educating, for it has a divine mission from Our Lord to help all to arrive at the fullness of Christian life" (Code of Canon Law 794 §1). In the Diocese of Armidale, the particular local Church fulfils this mandate in a special way through its Catholic schools. The Council has an important role in providing advice and support in relation to all aspects of education in the system of schools with major areas of responsibility including the evangelising mission of schools and religious education of all children in the schools.

Following a recruitment process, I was delighted to appoint the following highly credentialed Council Members:

**Mr Peter Maher OAM (Chair):** CEO Challenge Community Services; former member of the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn Catholic Education Commission; former Catholic school principal

**Mr David Condon (Deputy Chair):** Former Director of Schools, Diocese of Lismore

**Professor Richard Rymarz:** BBI-TAITE Professor & Head of Research

**Doctor Robyn Cox:** UNE Associate Professor and Curriculum Head of Department

**Father Paul Chandler:** Priest, Diocese of Armidale and former Catholic school teacher

**Ms Janet Freeman:** Independent Education Consultant; former principal

**Ms Jennifer Harman:** Chancellor, Diocese of Armidale

**Mr David Smith:** Diocesan Financial Administrator, Diocese of Armidale

The Council members collectively have expertise in primary and secondary school education; school and system leadership; curriculum; teacher training and accreditation; research, Catholic mission and Church life; finance and accounting; legal and compliance; risk management and governance. I welcome the Council members as they commence their important task in assisting me in fulfilling this most significant mission in the Diocese.

Most Reverend Michael Kennedy  
**Bishop of Armidale**





## *Director's Message- Chris Smyth*

During a year that presented many new challenges, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Armidale continued to demonstrate their commitment to ongoing school improvement. Following a restructure of the CSO at the end of 2019, the year began with new members of both the Leadership Team and the Mission and Learning Team. Our mission and moral purpose is based on our Catholic Principles and Values, and our schools continue to provide staff retreats; strong religious education programs; participation in prayer and liturgy; and work in partnership with local parishes.

Our focus on learning, collaboration and results continued as we faced the challenges of school lockdowns; blended learning approaches; and CSO staff working from home. And yet, despite these challenges, we can be justifiably pleased with the growth and achievements of our students in literacy and numeracy which see us amongst the top performing dioceses in Australia when comparing like-school communities.

The agility of the CSO and school staff was demonstrated when our Learning Continuity Plan for Schools was developed and released, and we trusted our school leaders and staff to make the best decisions for their local school communities. The focus on caring for students and their families resulted in increased communication and collaboration with parents, and the provision of learning tasks that met the individual needs of students. The government began to recognise the inequities faced by students in rural and regional Australia, and we continued to advocate for equity-based school funding and improved access to the Internet.

In the area of human resources we continued to develop policies that address our key risks of retention and recruitment of staff. The growing need to incentivise positions in regional, rural and remote areas was identified in the Federal Government's Halsey Review (2018) into regional, rural and remote education in Australia. Any increase in our equity funding will need to be further allocated in this area into the future. We completed due diligence for an enterprise human resources and payroll system, and the roll out of this project will commence in 2022.

In the finance area we completed the roll out of the Compass student information system, and the TechnologyOne Financial Management System (FMS) at the CSO. The enterprise FMS was piloted in one school and a project plan for a roll out in 2021 was commenced. The accountabilities for government funds continued to increase in 2021 as governments justifiably look to see how the non-government sector is spending taxpayer money. We continued to be active in explaining to parents and governments that Catholic education provides parental choice and the freedom of parents to send their children to a school that supports their faith development.

As a member Diocese of CeNET we continued to upgrade our system ICT infrastructure and technology in schools. Cyber security continued to be addressed and the new helpdesk system provided faster response times and better tracking of system service interruptions. We began the roll out of a new VOIP phone system that will continue into 2022. All students in primary and secondary schools now have individual access to a laptop.

We remain committed to producing students who have experienced the face of Christ in their interactions in the school community. We support our students in growing in their understanding of the teachings of the Catholic church and the values they reflect. We help our students to come to know and encounter Jesus Christ in a way that impacts on their values and behaviours so that they can graduate to make a positive difference in society, and continue a faith journey of inquiry and acceptance of the spirituality of the Catholic tradition.

My thanks to the team at the CSO, school principals and their teams in the schools and the school communities for their spirit of support and collaboration during 2020. My special thanks to Bishop Michael Kennedy and the priests of the Diocese for their continued commitment to Catholic education and the important role it plays in the mission of the Church in Australia.

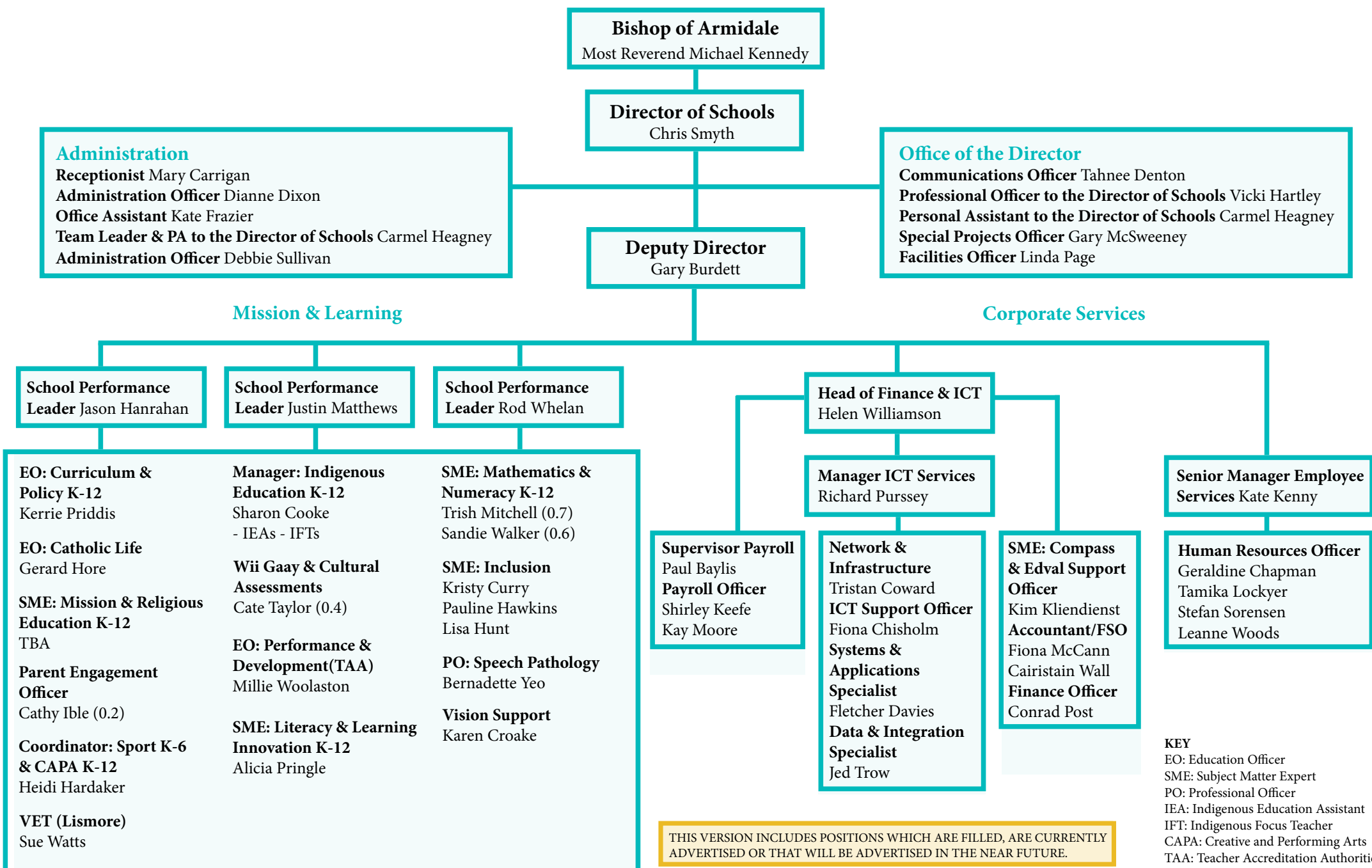
Chris Smyth B.Sc (Ed.) M.Ed (Leadership) M.Ed (RE) Grad Dip (Ed. System Leadership)

**Director of Schools**

# 2020 Commencement Model



Catholic Schools Office  
Diocese of Armidale



# *Review of Operations*

## *System Performance*

### *Mission and Learning Report*

In providing support to the schools and students we serve across our diocesan schools, 2020 presented a number of challenges and opportunities for the Mission and Learning Team (MaLT). The primary work of the team this year included developing a new team with different structures, roles and responsibilities; supporting schools during COVID-19 and remote learning, and the subsequent return to a 'new normal' after remote learning; as well as an accelerated approach to the implementation of changes related to student support, instructional leadership, pedagogy, and the development of teams.

The key aspects of achievement for the team in 2020 include:

- The development of new ways of working as part of a revamped Mission and Learning Team, where virtually all team members were new or took on different roles within the team. The team members adapted well to these changes, and the development of a strong sense of team in support of schools was well received. The team continued and further developed our approach to the use of research and data to inform our next steps. The future will include the ongoing use of data across the system to support decisions that determine the steps we take in support of schools and in particular, ensuring that we have an agile approach to the provision of professional learning to enable us to meet school staff at their point of need.
- The approach to remote learning throughout the COVID-19 lockdown period was well received by schools, and provided an opportunity for further development of positive, constructive relationships between schools and the CSO. The clear message that—within a framework detailed by the Mission and Learning and Leadership Teams—we trusted schools to make appropriate choices to meet the needs of their school community during this time enabled schools to flexibly approach the rapidly changing needs of their students, families and teachers. The fact that most students were able to continue to grow in their learning throughout this period was testament to the work done by the schools and the CSO staff. This time also emphasised the vital role that schools have in their communities, and the importance of the connection our students have to their school and their teachers.
- The MaST program was implemented in 2020 with the goal of improving teachers' capacity to teach mathematics in Stage 1. The focus on development of teacher understanding of, and pedagogy in mathematics is proving valuable, and this project will continue and expand in 2021.
- The implementation of the new student support framework, Living Well, Learning Well (LWLW) has been a significant success. This framework was rolled out in many schools throughout Term 4 2020. There was a significant amount of positive feedback in response to the LWLW training provided by the School Performance Leaders. The remaining schools will have this delivered early in the new year. The work of the MaLT in supporting this rollout cannot be underestimated, and we will be working on ensuring the fidelity of the implementation of the LWLW Framework during 2021. This will include the ongoing collection and analysis of learning and behaviour data to assist in the support of schools and students.
- Co-designing targeted-intervention-based staffing. The coherent language of schools reflecting on their areas of greatest positive influence, their greatest challenges, and the support needed to address their challenges was reflected across the diocese. This led to almost \$3million of targeted interventions being provided to schools, where the staffing will have the greatest impact on improving the conditions of learning, teaching, wellbeing and faith development.

- Principals provided positive feedback on the process of SPLS and schools co-designing the review of their 2020 Annual Improvement Plan, and planning their next steps in the 2021 Annual Improvement Plan. The co-designing process enabled a tightening of the work done by schools which not only reduced their workload for 2021, but also helped to ensure that their focus was on the two or three areas of work that will have the greatest impact in 2021.
- The school review and audit processes were significantly reduced in 2020, and this will continue to be refined in the coming years. The work done on the curriculum audits was exceptional, with the focus on professional learning combined with desk audits resulting in improved quality and compliance of teacher programs.

In what was a challenging year, there have been numerous achievements by the Mission and Learning Team, including many that we were not able to mention here. As we approach 2021, we are looking forward to continuing our work to: build strong teams, ensure our schools have great learning and teaching, and implement 'Living Well Learning Well' as we further enhance the authentic Catholic community of care.







New CSO Staff 2020: L-R (Back Row): Kristy Curry (Subject Matter Expert SME: Inclusion), Gary Burdett (Deputy Director), Alicia Pringle (SME: Literacy & Learning Innovation), Bernadette Yeo (Professional Officer: Speech Pathologist), Millie Woolaston (Educational Officer: Performance and Development), Heidi Hardaker (Coordinator: Sport & CAPA), Chris Smyth (Director of Schools). L-R (Front Row): Kate Kenny (Senior Manager Employee Services), Justin Matthews (School Performance Leader), Rod Whelan (School Performance Leader), Jason Hanrahan (School Performance Leader).





St Joseph's Uralla awarded the 2020 Roger O'Sullivan Memorial Award for their innovative Sheep Manure Project.

# *System Development*

## *Human Resources Report*

### **Recruitment**

Following a review in 2019 by CCER, principals identified recruitment as a major issue about which they interact with the CSO HR team. In 2020 the CSO introduced a more centralised and proactive recruitment process for both schools and the CSO. This process actively addresses the concerns raised by principals. The application process has been streamlined and converted to an online process which is coordinated by the CSO Employee Services Team.

There had previously been no documented recruitment strategy and the process was very reactive—triggered only when a vacant position was identified. This limited the attraction of the number of potential candidates. The current recruitment strategy works to target a suitably diverse and broad range of candidates. Through the ongoing development of strong relationships with potential employees, the new process establishes and maintains a talent pool so that when a suitable position becomes available, the relevant candidates will actively be encouraged to apply. This is particularly important for our schools in remote areas.

Overall, the response to the new recruitment process has been positive; however, we have continued to learn from stakeholder feedback. This feedback will assist us as we continue to refine our processes and practices. The introduction of a new HR/Payroll system will allow us to reduce the time associated with a significant number of the administrative functions associated with recruitment.

### **School support**

In 2020 the Employee Services Team worked to raise awareness of the team's functions and the support offered to schools. This strengthened relationships with principals and other school leaders, and as a result, schools now seek employment relations advice earlier, which results in the achievement of better outcomes. This includes matters in areas such as performance management, risk, child safety and employment conditions.

### **COVID-19 response**

It was inspirational to witness the hard work and resilience shown by staff during the pandemic. The CSO worked collaboratively with schools to ensure that students and staff were supported. There were canteen staff assisting with sanitising classrooms, education assistants undertaking a virtual check-in on students at home, and rotating rosters of teachers to ensure that every student that needed to be at school could be there. We all coped with what seemed to be an ever-changing list of restrictions that, for the most part, everyone took in their stride. While we remain unsure what the pandemic will bring in 2021, we can look forward to facing the challenges with the same spirit that we did in 2020.

## *Facilities Report*

The Facilities Section was formed in 2020 to be responsible for the efficient management of building infrastructure across the Diocese. The operational work of the Facilities Team includes the provision of advice to schools regarding various maintenance and insurance issues as they occur.

During the year, the main focus was on the capital works projects at St Joseph's, West Tamworth; St Xavier's, Gunnedah; and O'Connor Catholic College, Armidale. The West Tamworth was completed and handed over to the school and parish on 16 December. The projects at Gunnedah and O'Connor commenced mid year with Gunnedah scheduled to be completed in September 2021, and O'Connor in early 2022.

The 2016 Condition Assessment Reports for schools across the diocese, and discussions with principals informed the scope of works for the 2020 School Maintenance Project. This work commenced late in Term 3 2020 and provided \$1.2M worth of improvements to our schools.





St Joseph's Primary West Tamworth, Capital Works Project.





O'Connor Catholic College, Capital Works Project.





St Xavier's Primary Gunnedah, Capital Works Project.

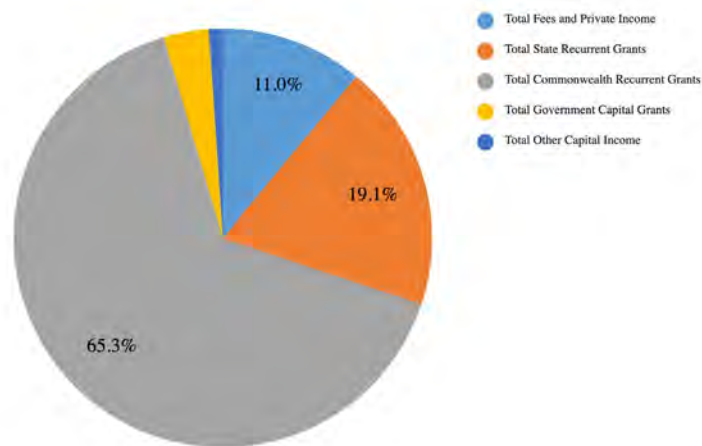


## Financial and ICT Report

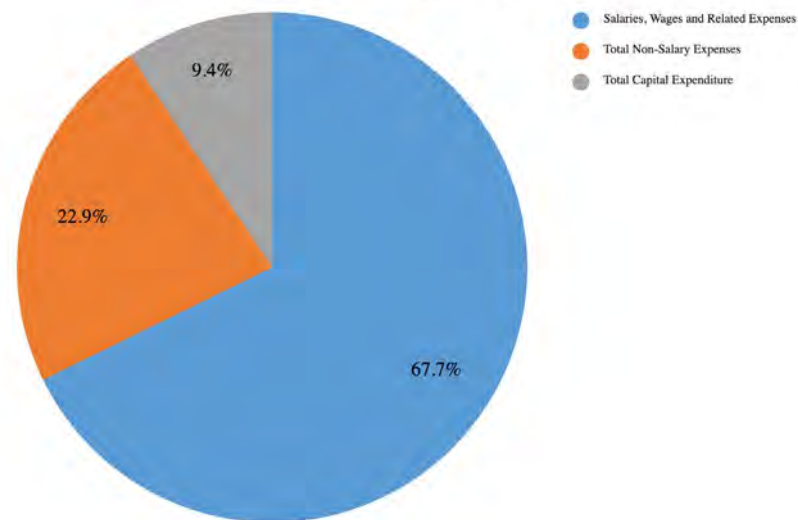
2020 was a year of challenge and change across the Armidale school system. The uncertainty and impact of COVID-19 presented many challenges and changes for our schools and their communities. Due to its sound financial position, the Armidale school system was able to support all families in need throughout COVID, and the persistent drought. The ICT team supported schools through remote learning and ensured the connectivity vital for the success of learning from home.

Change came in many small and larger forms. The ONCE project continued with all schools having implemented Compass as their student information system. Our schools are now making plans to further use this new system and its functionality to the advantage of all. A pilot of the Technology One finance system commenced at one school late in the year. At the conclusion of 2020, the school system continues to be financially sound, and plans to continue to invest in both human and physical resources that will improve the faith and learning of all students.

2020 Income - All School Locations



2020 Expenditure - All School Locations



McCarthy Catholic College, Tamworth.





St Mary's Primary Armidale celebrating Loud Shirt Day (Friday 23rd October) to help raise funds for children with hearing loss.



*Learning looked a little different in 2020 with the COVID-19 Pandemic*







# Catholic Schools Week 2020

26 July - 1 August



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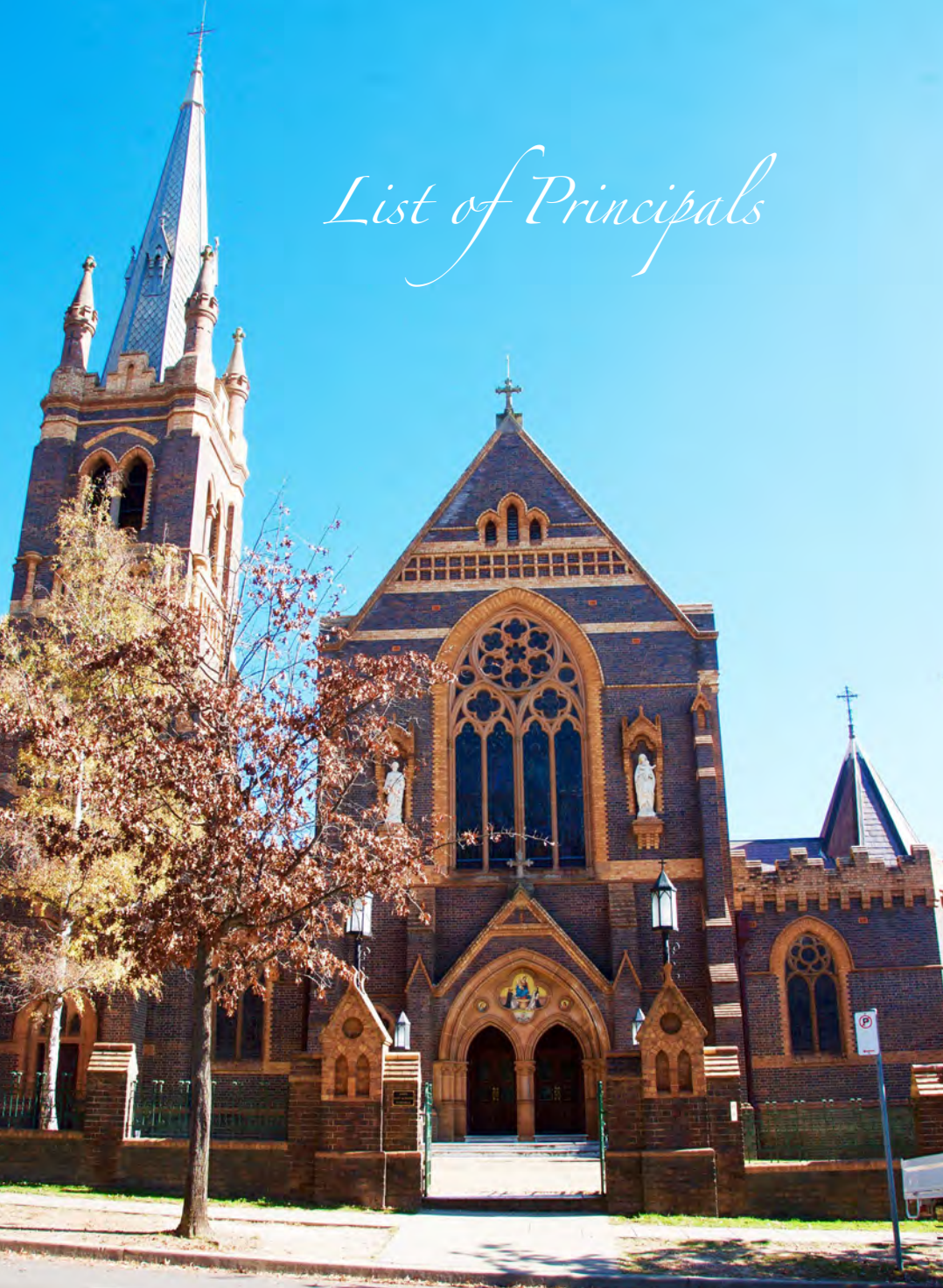


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Catholic Schools Office  
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# *List of Principals*

Town	School	Principal 2020
Armidale	St Mary's Primary School	Alanna McRae
Armidale	O'Connor Catholic College	Regina Menz
Barraba	St Joseph's Primary School	Rachel Caskey
Boggabri	Sacred Heart Primary School	Dallas Hyatt
Glen Innes	St Joseph's Primary School	Maria Mowle
Gunnedah	St Xavier's Primary School	Jennifer Honner
Gunnedah	St Mary's College	Max Quirk
Guyra	St Mary of the Angels Primary School	Sharon Wittig
Inverell	Holy Trinity School	Jillian Rainger
Manilla	St Michael's Primary School	Karen Keys
Moree	St Philomena's School	Jamie McDowall
Mungindi	St Joseph's Primary School	Deborah Harrison
Narrabri	St Francis Xavier's Primary School	Michael Ball
Quirindi	St Joseph's Primary School	Pauline Long
South Tamworth	St Edward's Primary School	Alison Hatton, Lisa McSweeney
Tamworth	St Nicholas' Primary School	John Clery
Tamworth	McCarthy Catholic College	Geoff McManus
West Tamworth	St Joseph's Primary School	Katie Hanes
Tenterfield	St Joseph's Primary School	Cherie Yates
Uralla	St Joseph's Primary School	Judy Elks
Walcha	St Patrick's Primary School	Belinda Burton
Walgett	St Joseph's Primary School	Donna Fiechtner
Warialda	St Joseph's Primary School	Joseph Dimech
Wee Waa	St Joseph's Primary School	Alistair Stewart





St Mary of the Angels Primary School, Guyra.

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