

Introduction

Catholic education is intrinsic to the mission of the Church. It is one means by which the Church fulfils its role in assisting people to discover and embrace the fullness of life in Christ.

The first priority of a Catholic school is to provide a Catholic education for Catholic children. This priority reflects the historical context of Catholic education in Australia, as well as confirming the participation of Catholic schools in the mission of the Church. As a result, formation and education in a MACS school must be based on the principles of Catholic doctrine.

Schools governed by Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) are primarily for Catholic children. MACS and schools work in collaboration to strive for the highest possible level of Catholic enrolment.

To ensure that Catholic schools are accessible for all Catholic families, this policy promotes a consistent and transparent approach to establishing and implementing local school enrolment admission policies, and complies with all relevant legislation. To achieve this objective, schools operated by MACS are required to cooperate and collaborate to ensure fair and equitable access to Catholic schools for families.

This policy supports the special relationship that continues to exist between the Catholic Church and the non-Catholic Eastern churches, based on a belief in the same sacraments and a close nexus in theology and catechesis.

The MACS Enrolment Policy adheres to the minimum standards required by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

Purpose

This policy, and accompanying procedures, provides a set of protocols to guide schools to maintain the highest possible level of Catholic enrolment. Adherence to the policy ensures that all schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne achieve this goal consistent with the minimum standards required by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

Scope

This policy applies to schools governed by MACS and is consistent with the enrolment policy for schools within the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Principles

Inclusiveness

MACS schools are established primarily for Catholic children from the school's priority parish. Each MACS school should strive to be open and welcoming to all Catholic students, regardless of their background, and do everything reasonable to accommodate each student's individual needs. MACS encourages and supports schools to extend particular assistance to children who are poor, disadvantaged or considered most at risk.

MACS considers it important for schools to develop strategies to raise the percentage of Catholic children attending Catholic schools. MACS and its schools are open to the enrolment of children of other Christian traditions and faiths, however, priority will be given to children from non-Catholic Eastern churches. Children from other religious traditions or of no religion should also be provided with an opportunity to enrol in Catholic schools, should they choose to apply and there is sufficient capacity within the school.

Partnership between parents and school

Parents/guardians/carers are the first educators of their children. By enrolling their child in a Catholic school, parents/guardians/carers enter into a partnership with the school to promote and support their child's education, in particular their education in faith. While the school promotes access to a Catholic education through the school enrolment policy, it is the parents/guardians/carers' responsibility to support the school in furthering the spiritual and academic life of their child.

Exercise of pastoral discretion in enrolment decisions

Local pastoral discretion is an important element of decision-making with regard to enrolment in a MACS school. While the first priority of the principal is to enrol the children of Catholic parents, pastoral discretion may be exercised in enrolment decisions where deemed appropriate.

Access to information about enrolment in a MACS school

All schools registered in Victoria, including MACS schools, are required to have a clearly defined enrolment policy and procedures which make clear who is eligible for enrolment as a domestic student. MACS schools must have an enrolment agreement with parents/guardians/carers which is publicly available and easily accessible to current and prospective parents/guardians/carers. The enrolment agreement must, at a minimum, include:

- codes of conduct for students, parents, carers and guardians
- fees
- educational services provided
- the grounds on which enrolment can be terminated.

Priority enrolment

There is an agreed order of priority for enrolment in MACS schools, which must be followed in the enrolment policy and procedures. As systemic Catholic schools, the first priority of Catholic schools is the provision of a Catholic education for Catholic children from the school's priority parish/s.

While Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne are open to families of all faith and non-religious backgrounds, they must aim and give priority to enrol Catholic and Orthodox children ahead of other Christian denominations, non-Christians or children of no religious affiliation.

Definitions

Catholic child

For the purpose of enrolment in a Catholic school, a child is considered to be Catholic if they are a member of the Catholic Church, usually established by a Certificate of Baptism, and have fully participated in a sacramental program or there is evidence of an intention to complete their sacramental journey.

Orthodox child

Orthodox refers to non-Catholic Eastern churches which includes Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox and Other Orthodox.

Catholic school

A Catholic school operated by MACS is one which operates with the consent of the Archbishop of Melbourne, where formation and education are based on the principles of the Catholic doctrine.

Enrolment catchment area

The enrolment catchment area is a defined area from which a school enrolls students as officially designated to a school by the MACS Board.

For the majority of primary schools, this will be the parish to which the school belongs. In parishes with more than one primary school, the catchment for each school is determined by the parish in consultation with MACS. For secondary colleges, it will be those parishes designated as priority parishes by MACS.

Parish

'Parish' refers to the local parish as defined by its geographical boundaries and student location is based on home address.

Priority parish

A priority parish is defined as a parish included in the catchment area of a school. Children living within a priority parish catchment area receive priority in enrolment over children who reside outside the priority parish catchment area.

Enrolment Priorities

There is an agreed order of priority for enrolment in MACS schools. Schools are able to elaborate on this list but must ensure that any local criteria are published widely so that enrolment places are offered within acceptable timeframes. The list should be attached to the school's enrolment policy as a guide to parents/guardians/carers.

MACS primary schools

The order of priority for MACS primary schools is:

1. Catholic children who are residents of the parish
2. siblings of children already enrolled in the school
3. Catholic children who are not residents of the parish but are recognised as parishioners by the parish priest
4. Catholic children from other parishes (for pastoral reasons)
5. children from non-Catholic Eastern churches (i.e. Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox and other Orthodox) who are residents of the parish
6. children from non-Catholic Eastern churches (i.e. Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox and Other Orthodox) who reside outside the parish
7. other Christian children who are residents of the parish
8. other Christian children who reside outside the parish
9. non-Christian children who are residents of the parish
10. non-Christian children who reside outside the parish.

MACS secondary colleges

The order of priority for MACS secondary colleges is:

1. Catholic children who are residents of a designated priority parish and have attended a Catholic primary school in one of those parishes
2. siblings of children already enrolled in the school
3. Catholic children who are residents of a designated priority parish and have not attended a Catholic primary school
4. Catholic children from other parishes (for pastoral reasons)
5. children from non-Catholic Eastern churches (i.e. Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox and other Orthodox) who have attended a Catholic primary school and are residents of a priority parish
6. children from non-Catholic Eastern churches (i.e. Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox and other Orthodox) who have not attended a Catholic primary school and are residents of a priority parish
7. other Christian children who have attended a Catholic primary school and are residents of a priority parish
8. other Christian children who have not attended a Catholic primary school and are residents of a priority parish
9. non-Christian children who have attended a Catholic primary school and are residents of a priority parish
10. non-Christian children who have not attended a Catholic primary school and are residents of a priority parish.

Year 7 ceilings

When prioritising students for enrolment in Year 7, all MACS secondary colleges must adhere to the Year 7 ceiling that is currently agreed to between the college and MACS. Secondary colleges cannot enrol Year 7 students beyond the Year 7 ceiling without the express consent of the MACS Executive Director.

Information to Be Collected

At enrolment, MACS schools are required to collect particular information about parents/guardians/carers and their child. Parents/guardians/carers are required to provide particular information about their child during the enrolment process in order for MACS and the school to meet the duty of care obligations and to satisfy government requirements. Lodging an enrolment form does not guarantee enrolment at the particular school. For secondary enrolments, students are required to nominate two preferences.

Achieving a High Level of Catholic Enrolment

Catholic schools are expected to maintain and/or work towards the highest possible level of Catholic enrolment. If a school does not have a high level of Catholic and non-Catholic Eastern Church enrolments, it must attempt to increase its percentage by establishing a realistic target.

Parental Responsibilities

At the time of enrolment, each school should ensure that parents/guardians/carers understand they have a responsibility to provide ongoing support for their child's Catholic education. In particular, parents/guardians/carers should be asked to make an explicit commitment to the following responsibilities:

- When enrolling a child in a MACS school they should complete the school's enrolment form and ensure it is returned by the due date. This does not guarantee enrolment in the school.
- Be prepared to support the school in the Catholic education of their child and involve themselves as much as possible, as well as committing to adhering to the expected standards of parental behaviour as outlined in the school's Parent/Guardian/Carer Code of Conduct.
- Acknowledge and commit to meeting the financial responsibilities arising from the ongoing enrolment of their child. Any difficulties in meeting this commitment should be discussed with the principal.
- Advise the principal of any court order or custodial arrangement/s that may exist in relation to their child, or any changes to such order/s, and provide a copy of the court order/s and any subsequent changes for the child's school file.
- Provide the school with an immunisation history statement.

Termination of enrolment

In certain limited circumstances a termination of enrolment may occur where the relationship between a school and a family has irretrievably broken down as a result of significant and/or repeated breaches by a parent/guardian/carer of the school's Parent/Guardian/Carer Code of Conduct (Code of Conduct).

A termination of enrolment on the basis of parental/guardian/carer conduct must be approved by the Director, Learning and Regional Services, and such approval would only be provided in the following circumstances:

- a breach of the Code of Conduct on the part of a parent/guardian/carer has previously occurred
- the parent/guardian/carer has, because of that previous breach, been warned that any subsequent breach of the Code of Conduct by them (or the family) may result in a termination of enrolment
- a further breach of the Code of Conduct by the parent/guardian/carer, or by another family member in appropriate circumstances (including where the principal is satisfied on reasonable grounds that that other family member has been warned or is otherwise aware that a warning has previously been given) occurs.

A termination of enrolment may also occur where any parent/guardian/carer has engaged in conduct on a single occasion which constitutes a serious breach of the Parent/Guardian/Carer Code of Conduct (involving for example, conduct which poses a serious risk to staff or student health and safety.) In these circumstances, it will not be necessary for a warning to be given before consideration is given to termination of enrolment.

A decision to withdraw or terminate the enrolment of a student may only be made by the Director, Learning and Regional Services upon consideration of the following:

- the view of the principal of the school
- an objective assessment of all presenting circumstances, including the nature and gravity of the conduct and whether any previous warnings have been provided to the parent/guardian/carer.

Archdiocesan Enrolment Committee

The Archdiocesan Enrolment Committee provides advice to the MACS Executive Director on enrolment matters such as:

- Catholic/non-Catholic Eastern Church enrolments for each school and the strategies undertaken by schools to attain and/or maintain a high level of Catholic enrolment

- identifying and assisting schools which are experiencing difficulty in increasing and/or maintaining enrolment of Catholic students
- requests by schools relating to their inability to increase their Catholic/non-Catholic Eastern Church percentage
- monitoring and assisting secondary schools in terms of the Year 7 enrolment ceilings and priority parish arrangements
- strategies to assist in the resolution of any complaints by schools concerning the enrolment practices of other schools
- establishing a higher profile for Catholic education so that all Catholic families are aware of and welcomed by the appropriate Catholic school.

All committee positions are nominees of the MACS Executive Director. The core membership of the Archdiocesan Enrolment Committee includes:

- the Chair, appointed by the MACS Executive Director
- one MACS Regional General Manager
- one representative of RI/MPJP schools
- two representatives of MACS secondary colleges
- a representative of MACS primary schools
- one parish priest
- the MACS Chief Planning and Infrastructure Officer.

Appointments to further augment the core membership of the committee are made at the discretion of the MACS Executive Director, as required.

Relevant Legislation

Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.)

The Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.) require a registered school to have a clearly defined enrolment policy that complies with all applicable state and Commonwealth laws. The principal must be familiar with the relevant provisions of this legislation and the MACS Enrolment Policy and, as appropriate, ensure application of this enrolment policy.

Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic.)

This legislation prohibits discrimination by an educational authority against a person in deciding who should be admitted as a student, in the terms on which the authority admits a person as a student, or by refusing or failing to accept the person's application for admission as a student. However, an exception is provided for an educational authority that operates an educational institution wholly or mainly for students of a particular sex, religious belief, age or age group, such that it may exclude from that institution people who are not of the particular sex, religious belief, age or age group. All other discrimination in enrolment of students is prohibited.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)

Under this legislation, discrimination based on disability is unlawful. It applies to school authorities and their employees. The definition of disability is broad and includes physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, and neurological or learning disability, as well as physical disfigurement and the presence in the body of a disease-causing organism.

Relevant for enrolments, it is unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against a person on the ground of the person's disability, or a disability of any of the person's associates, by refusing or failing to accept the person's application for admission as a student, or in the terms and conditions on which it is prepared to admit the person as a student.

However, it is not unlawful to refuse or fail to accept a person's application for admission as a student in an educational institution where the person, if admitted as a student by the educational authority, would require services or facilities that are not required by students who do not have a disability and the provision of which would impose unjustifiable hardship on the educational authority.

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

This legislation governs how schools must handle personal information collected as part of the enrolment procedure.

MACS, the governing body, has adopted a Privacy Policy in respect of MACS schools with which all schools must comply. Schools must ensure the Privacy Policy is kept up-to-date on the school's website and in applicable forms and school documentation.

Related Policies

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) guidelines
Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd (MACS) policies