

Parramatta diocese leads the way

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Staff from the Catholic Education Office in Parramatta are working closely with school staff and professional associations to develop a vision statement and library policy for school libraries, a learning-centred role statement for teacher-librarians and the library, as well as a strong professional development program.

The Catholic Education Office has recognised that strong school library collections are integral to effective learning outcomes and underpin the development of lifelong learning capabilities. It has acknowledged that such collections needed improving and began a collaborative process that has resulted in substantial funds being allocated to each of its seventy-three primary and secondary schools for collection development. The following outlines the process followed in the review of the primary schools.

Background visits to school libraries over several years by area administrators and other Catholic Education Office staff as well as discussions with school principals and teacher librarians highlighted the need for significant improvement in information collections to ensure that they support learning goals of the schools.

The Catholic Education Office employed two external consultants, Dr Ross Todd (University of Technology, Sydney) and Ms Celeste McNicholas (Marist Sister's College Woolwich) to review six primary schools that were representative of the Diocese. These included schools that had experienced a rapid growth in population, smaller older schools, large schools in a high socio-economic area and those with a high NESB population. The report that followed indicated that information collections were below the recommended national guidelines as identified in 'Learning for the future'.

The directors at the Catholic Education Office approved the implementation of a process to improve the collections and provide professional development activities for principals and teacher-librarians. The process centres on a 'train the trainer' model, and partnerships between the school

principal and teacher-librarian, and involving the Diocese's area administrators. Invitations were sent to area administrators, twelve principals and their teacher-librarians to visit one of two primary schools chosen as case studies for the training.

Six principals and their teacher librarians visited one of the two schools. The host library's principal and teacher-librarian were involved in detailed discussions about teaching and learning, the school's vision, the nature of the school community, and the needs of the students at the school. The discussion, lead by the consultants, was held with participants watching, contributing and questioning. The day concluded with a visit to the school library, where participants evaluated the collection against the needs of the school and its learning goals. It was amazing to see how easy it was to evaluate the collection in light of the discussion that had taken place.

The fourteen schools involved in the 'train the trainer' process were then allocated three or four schools that they were to visit and evaluate the library collection. In order to prepare for the visit, all primary principals and teacher librarians in the Diocese were invited into the Catholic Education Office where the consultants explained the evaluation process and worked through the substantive evaluation documentation that was to be completed. Schools were then given the opportunity to discuss the process that would occur at their school. The response from the training day was very positive. The principals appreciated the time to talk about teaching and learning and to see more clearly how this linked with collection development, and the teacher-librarians appreciated the opportunity for the principle to understand the complexity of their role and its links to the learning processes in the school.

Following this training program, all primary schools across the Diocese were visited. In many schools it became obvious that the collection, while supporting teaching and learn-

ing, needed considerable review, expansion and development. The visiting principal and teacher librarian, worked collaboratively on the evaluation. A copy of the evaluation was sent to staff at the Catholic Education Office and the school that had been visited. Once the school received a copy of the evaluation documents, they were asked to write a brief collection development plan based on the information discussed and provided. A copy of the plan was sent to the Catholic Education Office after which each school was allocated funds to purchase resources that supported their collection development plan. After the visits to the schools many teacher-librarians, with the principal's support, began to cull the library collection, and to engage in negotiations with school staff to revitalise collections. To facilitate this, all schools were allocated a minimum of \$14 000 by the Catholic Education Office, with further funding based on the detailed analysis of the evaluations. It is likely that substantial funds will be made available to most primary schools to ensure the relevance and vitality of library collections.

The future for primary school libraries in the Parramatta Diocese is an exciting one. Not only has the system recognised the need for funds specifically designated to libraries but it has also recognised the professional development needs of teacher-librarians. To this end, all teacher-librarians in the Diocese have been offered opportunity to participate in professional development provided by the Department of Information Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. The Diocese is also encouraging and supporting teacher-librarians who want to update to dual qualifications by paying their university course fees and granting release days to complete the Graduate Diploma in Information offered by University of Technology, Sydney, and also taught on site at the Parramatta offices of the Catholic Education Office. The future for teacher-librarians playing an integral in learning in the Parramatta Diocese is indeed bright. The Diocese is the place to be! ■