

Supporting and developing new leaders a high priority for MACS

WRITTEN BY

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS)

Twenty-two Catholic school principals in the Archdiocese of Melbourne will be inducted into their new roles today at the first of four workshops addressing leadership, faith and formation, accountability and compliance, network learning and support.

Jim Miles, Executive Director, Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) says developing effective school leaders is a high priority for MACS and vital to the continuous improvement in the quality of education offered by Catholic schools.

‘Our principal induction program is designed to support new principals to develop their leadership strengths, establish new professional networks, and form and shape their capacity to lead with confidence’, he said.

‘Catholic school leadership is synonymous with leading a community of faith. It encompasses the capacity to articulate a clearly defined vision for the future of the school and inspire others to follow.

‘Our school leaders are required to be both emotionally intelligent and resilient, recognising that leadership starts from within – they must know their own mission, beliefs, values, gifts, strengths and limitations.

‘This results in an enduring commitment to their own personal, spiritual and professional growth and, in turn, enhances the leader’s capacity to accompany and support the growth of others.’

Mr Miles said the induction program recognises the complexity of school stewardship, discernment and management and the accountabilities inherent in the role.

‘Supporting our belief that induction is a process rather than an event, the program provides support for new principals through a combination of internal workshops and networking opportunities, as well as externally brokered programs, including mentoring’, he said.

New principal of St Joseph’s School, Black Rock, Liam Buckley says moving from a deputy principal to a principal role requires a change in mindset that takes some getting used to.

‘As the leader, you have to trust and empower your teachers and staff team. You also need to be an advocate for your students, families and staff, and meet their needs.

‘The role is very diverse and can be emotionally draining. From a personal wellbeing perspective, you also need to find strategies to be able to “switch off”.

‘Developing networks of critical friends and principal colleagues will be vitally important’, he said.

Angela Tonkin who commenced as principal at St Peter’s School, Epping, in Term 3 last year says she was given good advice about the importance of listening – to parents, students and staff – as a vital skill for new principals.

‘We have made some changes to the operation of the school, but they have been driven by the voices of the people who really count, as well as the data.

'Being a principal is one of the hardest things I've ever done, but it's also incredibly rewarding. I think it takes a "village" to support a principal and I'm greatly appreciative of the programs put in place by MACS and the opportunities to build collegial networks', she said.

Mark Westwood sees his new role as principal at St Joseph's Primary School, Boronia, as an opportunity to give back to his community.

'I am in the unique situation where I have been a parishioner in the community for 18 years and also a parent, as my own children attended St Joseph's.

'It is a lovely, close school community at the foot of the Dandenongs that I feel privileged to lead.

'I've been a part of Catholic education right through primary, secondary and tertiary education, and I have had wonderful enriching experiences that I want to now offer to the children and families here at St Joseph's.

'I'm looking forward to the induction program to help develop strong relationships with my principal colleagues and regional managers and tap into their experience', he said.

Assunta Iacovino, new principal at Mother of God School, Ardeer, says she sees the role ultimately as an opportunity to positively influence the lives of the children in her care.

'As a leader in a Catholic school, we are privileged to be able to help children and their families to reach their potential in all dimensions of their lives, including the spiritual and religious dimension', she said.

'One of the things I love the most is building relationships with staff, students, parents and community. I enjoy experiencing and embracing the cultural diversity of the community at Mother of God.

'As principal, I hope I can positively influence and build the capacity of staff to be leaders within Catholic education. I want to build the understanding that everyone in the community at Mother of God is a leader and is pivotal in contributing towards our culture of welcome and helping everyone to flourish.

'As a new principal, there have been days when I have felt overwhelmed by the number of things requiring my attention and time, yet each one of them is crucial to the smooth running of the school and the wellbeing of the people in it.

'I have been very grateful for the support of colleagues, networks and MACS, and this induction program will help build my capacity to lead our school community effectively', she said.