



Archbishop's Office
GPO Box 89
CANBERRA ACT 2601

4 June 2014

Dear Parishioners of St Augustine's Parish Yass,

It is well over two months now since it was announced that the secondary component of Mt Carmel School will close at the end of the 2014 school year.

Despite very healthy numbers in the Mt Carmel Primary School, declining enrolments in the adjacent (Years 7-10) secondary component of the school forced this decision. Alternative Catholic Secondary education pathways outside Yass were offered for all students.

This news shocked many of you in the wonderful Yass community.

Since this time the whole matter has been vigorously debated. Some of my key staff and myself have participated in many meetings with the Secondary component of Mt Carmel School community and friends.

I have been pleased to observe a growing willingness towards a respectful and informed dialogue on this matter. Nothing is lost if such healthy dialogue grows.

I wish to thank most sincerely the many who have written to me from the Yass community expressing their heartfelt sentiments of a school deeply loved. I have learnt much from their kind correspondence. Thank you again.

From all I have received, I have learnt a deeper truth regarding Catholic Secondary education in Yass, not at all apparent over two months ago. Namely, there is a deep desire for a Year 7-12 Catholic Secondary School in the Yass region, rather than simply a Years 7-10 model operative in Yass since 1993 when the Mercy Sisters left the school. The demographics in the Yass region are growing quite dynamically. There is also a felt displeasure in accessing educational services from Canberra.

To pursue this strong and deep educational desire for a new model, a talented group was formed as the Yass Steering Committee. To assist them, I offered a list of benchmarks which I consider foundational if a Catholic Secondary School was to be seriously considered.

In recent days I have met representatives of the Yass Steering Committee with my key staff to consider whether these benchmarks can be met.

Thankfully, much progress has been made on a Business Plan. But much work still needs to be done.



Two major areas of concern are evident immediately.

Firstly, there is the area of the Catholic educational vision presented. The Steering Committee is looking for an "independent Catholic School". What does this mean? "Independent" – from what? If this means a Catholic School in the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn independent (i.e. separate) from my Catholic Education Office and my Catholic Education Commission – then such a school is not possible.

Catholics are a big "family"! The Bishop exercises his educational role by unifying the 14 secondary schools and the 42 primary schools of this Archdiocese under his pastoral care. Most of these schools are closely linked to our parishes. My key offices work with me to achieve this role and ensure our schools are Catholic not simply in name but are given every resource and opportunity to be Catholic in their very "soul". It is a ministry of service.

As a result, I cannot endorse this new model as proposed at present. This includes use of the name "Mt Carmel College" as it implies that it is a Catholic school. Also, use of school property and uniforms would not be appropriate as it would send out a confusing message.

Secondly, considerable progress has been made on various financial and administrative matters, including staffing arrangements, enrolment projections and marketing strategies. However, more detail is required regarding precise financial arrangements with the NSW State Government, Socio- Economic Status (SES) score, Loadings, capital expenditure on facilities, the impact on the existing school of new arrangements, and so on.

In conclusion, I believe much progress has been made in advancing towards a possible future Year 7-12 Secondary component of Mt Carmel School. I thank those talented and passionate members of the steering group for all their work to date. It is a new model for a "new" Yass community. We need to work together in the coming years to realise this dream prudently.

What about the present?

- I wish to reaffirm that the current Year 7-10 Secondary component of Mt Carmel School will close at the end of the 2014 school year.

My office will work in with the school to ensure that current Year 6-10 students are offered alternative Catholic education.

- I propose to establish a joint Yass Secondary Catholic School – Catholic Education Office Working Group to advance discussion on the proposal for a new model of Year 7-12 Catholic Secondary School at Yass in the future.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Archbishop Christopher Prowse
Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn