

ASPIRING EDUCATORS CHOOSING REGIONAL EXPERIENCES

This year, more student teachers from the city have ventured to the regions for their final placements.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Armidale have continued to build their partnership with the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) by placing students in Tamworth to give them a taste of regional living and the career opportunities that can be pursued in the bush.

Tamworth is the biggest regional hub of the *Armidale Catholic Schools* system, with three Catholic primary schools and one secondary school. Placing students in Tamworth not only allows for a positive learning experience in the classroom, it also provides the opportunity for students to be immersed in the unique social, sporting and cultural aspects of the town.

Director of Schools, Chris Smyth met with the students to discuss their experience and was blown away by their passion and willingness to embrace the culture and really throw themselves into a learning environment that is a little out of their comfort zone. He said, *“This is a fantastic opportunity to promote initial education in our regional, rural and remote setting. Teacher graduates are well supported with a professional learning community, catholic context and a culture that is collaborative with a real focus on learning and deliberate results orientation towards improving the learning and faith outcomes of young people in our schools ”*

The partnership is one of a number of UNDA initiatives nationally which aim to support pre-service teaching students. Students opt in to a regional or rural town for their pre-service professional experience placement. They are placed in pairs to minimise the feeling of isolation that some students may experience in a new town.

Notre Dame National Head of School, David Geelan says *“Schools in rural and regional Dioceses across Australia are currently very keen to employ new graduates to help them staff their classrooms. Students from urban settings are more likely to take up some of the fantastic career opportunities in regional schools if they get a taste of the schools and the lifestyle on their professional experience placements. It gives them confidence and a sense of familiarity with the new context. We are delighted that the Diocese of Armidale is supporting students in this way, which enriches graduates’ learning experiences and makes them more likely to teach students in the regions.”*

Alexandra, who has been placed at St Nicholas in Tamworth says *“I’m so lucky that my university has made such a strong connection with Armidale Catholic Schools. I have always wanted to do a placement in rural NSW and they have made it happen. I would recommend this experience to anyone.”*

“Notre Dame have been supporting us along the way, touching base with us and making sure that whilst we aren’t in Sydney we still receive assistance with our Graduate Teacher Performance Assessment (GTPA)” Molly (Notre Dame Student)

Supporting these placements not only supports the next cohort of teachers that are interested in rural, regional and remote education but, as these students are able to work as teachers from their 4th year, this also supports the ongoing recruitment strategy to entice young professionals to work in schools outside cities. *Armidale Catholic Schools* provides financial incentives to support these students living away from home for the duration of their placement.

Head of Employee Services, Kate Kenny says *“Our principals have been very responsive to the opportunity to host the students and nurture their journey. Our system supports these young people by teaming them up with our Early Career Coaches, providing them with accommodation, paying them a daily rate and guiding them to fulfill their career aspirations”*.

Notre Dame Student, Moira reflects on her time at St Joseph's Primary *"This teaching and learning experience goes beyond anything I have ever seen. The kids in the country have such a beautiful outlook on life and such a diverse range of experiences."*

Co Principal of St Joseph's Primary Tamworth, Greg O'Toole said, *"It's great to see these young teachers who are really enthusiastic about the vocation they have chosen. In this short 10 week period we have seen them learn, develop, improve and grow in our school community. It provides hope for the future of education in our system and beyond."*

Alicia who is also placed at St Joseph's said, *"I have received the utmost support from teachers, executives, early career coaches and diocese staff, which has been amazing. We have also participated in learning walks at other schools in Tenterfield, Quirindi and Manilla to watch the pedagogies of other teachers and learn more about their learning sequence. The level of collaboration across the system is inspiring"*

The Catholic school system prides itself on offering their employees support to feel settled not only in the workplace but in the wider community. They believe this level of inclusiveness and assistance is critical for teachers to bring the best version of themselves to their profession.

"I am so lucky that St Nicholas has given me the independence to take classes on my own and feel more in control of my teaching journey which is different to what some of my peers are experiencing in bigger city schools". (Alexandra)

We thank all those contributing to this initiative that sets young educators up for success as they move towards becoming proficient teachers.

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Armidale Catholic Schools administers 19 primary, two central and three secondary schools, and caters for the learning needs of just over 6000 students. The schools in the Diocese of Armidale are building a professional learning community in a Catholic context as a vehicle for school improvement.



Photo L-R Molly Hayes, Alexandra Egan (Notre Dame Student Teachers) with Chris Smyth (Director of Armidale Catholic Schools) at St Nicholas Tamworth.



Photo L-R Alicia Salas, Moira Watts (Notre Dame Student Teachers) at St Joseph's Tamworth.



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