



## Office of the Executive Director



**Dear colleagues, parents, and all members of our Catholic school communities,**

The end of the year, and the season of Advent, is traditionally a time for reflection and renewal, a time to seek peace, to rediscover hope and to express our gratitude and love.

In Catholic education, I have come to learn that gratitude grows from the bonds we create as we serve faithfully. And it comes from being part of a community serving a common purpose.

We are fortunate to have 11,000 incredible people in our CEWA staff community – all dedicated to providing safe, caring learning environments for the 77,000 students who enter our school gates each day.

It is my honour to acknowledge every staff member in Catholic schools, early learning and care settings and offices for that service; and particularly for ensuring that every child in our learning environments counts.

This year, it goes without saying, has been shaped by extraordinary events. Our staff, parents and broader communities have demonstrated the tremendous resilience and creativity of the human spirit, the collective strength of belonging and the significance of gratitude. These are the people who pivoted an entire system of education – advancing how and where learning is delivered, coordinating care and support for the most vulnerable in our communities, demonstrating love and gratitude on a level we could never imagine. And, most importantly of all, in the midst of relentless change, providing certainty and stability.

In reflecting on the extraordinary challenges facing Principals, staff, parents and students through the course of 2020, it is a unique privilege that schools in WA have been spared the widespread learning disruptions we have observed elsewhere.

Our school communities have found innovative, creative and inspiring ways to keep students engaged in their learning regardless of the challenges they faced. As an example, this year the Catholic Performing Arts Festival for Schools and Colleges showcased the talent and skills of our students in an online setting. Our important Leaders' Forums for Catholic education leaders were made COVID-safe by going small-scale and being hosted locally, ensuring ongoing investment in our leaders while fostering new conversations in a more hands-on, region-specific setting. The Quality Catholic Education Awards were launched, with a greater number of entries than any previous year, and participation in our system-wide online Webinar Weeks grew markedly.

Our schools have continued supporting Catholic agencies who help those in our communities who are disadvantaged and marginalised. As always, many have been raising funds and collecting supplies for appeals by St Vincent de Paul, Catholic Mission and Caritas. [Catholic Mission's Christmas appeal](#), in particular, highlights the role education can play in breaking down systems and cycles of poverty, and I would encourage you to consider supporting theirs – and the many other vitally important appeals.

Students of all ages achieved a great deal this year in the midst of global change and upheaval. Thousands of CEWA students finished Year 12 in circumstances that were particularly trying - sitting exams and aiming for achievements that will have an impact on their plans for the future. Well done to you all.

This year, it goes without saying, has reshaped our educational horizons and in so doing has been a stark reminder of our collective role in ensuring every child in Western Australia has access to the best educational facilities, learning opportunities and support – regardless of their family's individual circumstances or the choice of schooling made by their parents.

For more than 175 years, as long as some of the State's oldest Catholic schools have served their communities, parents and families of students attending Catholic schools have made a significant contribution to their children's education, saving the State Government millions of dollars annually.

Today, more than 77,000 students attend the 163 schools operated by CEWA. That is almost one in every five students in our State. CEWA is WA's seventh biggest employer and our schools employ 11,000 workers in teaching and non-teaching roles. This includes almost 3,000 staff in regional and remote WA schools.

Considering the far-reaching contribution – both socially and economically - that Catholic schools make to communities across the length and depth of WA, our pledge should be to work together to ensure all Catholic schools can better support our growing student population in contemporary, world-class facilities, whilst alleviating the financial burdens that disproportionately fall on Catholic school families.

In the lead up to next year's state election, we need to work together to ensure that this contribution is recognised, and that our staff have the assistance needed to continue to deliver the best education, faith formation, support and care to our students and the community.

CEWA is committed to continuing to ensure Western Australian families have choice when it comes to their children's education. We also believe WA deserves fairer funding that is needs-based, sector blind and supports diverse, non-government schools in all communities where they are desired. I encourage all in our Catholic school communities – and beyond – to learn more about the contribution that Catholic schools make to WA and to affirm in your communities that every child counts - <http://www.everychildcounts.net.au/>.

In this season of Advent as we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Christ child, my hope is that our communities will all experience the peace, joy and love that Jesus promises for family, friends and community. May this be a time to reflect on our blessings with gratitude, a time of renewal, and a time of renewed hope.

I wish you and your loved ones the blessings that Christmas presents us, and I look forward to a 2021 full of learning and growth in Catholic education.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Debra Sayce  
Executive Director  
Catholic Education Western Australia

***...the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!***

***Luke 2:10-11***

