Catholic Education Office  
Diocese of Wollongong

Literacy Statement  
Guidelines for implementing literacy initiatives in Diocesan schools K-12  
2003 - 2005
This document has been prepared by the Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Wollongong. It has been designed to assist school communities in supporting the literacy development of students.

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Forward

A focus on literacy within the total curriculum will always be a high priority for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Wollongong. The maxim that all teachers are teachers of literacy is now long established. In this document you will find the guiding principles that reinforce the vital role of literacy practices which aim to empower all students.

The capacity to interpret and make sense of the world through the use of language is one of the highest priorities of an education system. The empowerment of the individual that comes from being a literate human cannot be underestimated. That is why the Catholic Education Office, its system of schools and the support it gives to them through policy development, professional support and in-service, are of the highest priority.

The content of this document aims to give encouragement to all teachers in their role of developing literacy skills in students. All teachers are teachers of literacy and share in the universal objective of developing, challenging and improving the abilities of young people to engage with written materials, interpret and make use of them for understanding and creation.

This work in Literacy Policy and Statement represents a team evaluation over the last two years of current practices within our schools. I congratulate all those involved in its development and invite your school community to implement the principles and practices outlined in it. In doing so they will ensure more effective learning and teaching and the development of skills in young people that will allow them “to enhance their capacity to think, create and question, and thereby to participate more effectively in their society.”

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Contents

1. Rationale for Literacy in the Catholic School

2. Context

3. Defining Literacy

4. Diocesan Expectations

5. Implementation Strategies

6. Wider Community

7. Whole School Approach

8. Major Professional Development Initiatives

9. Assessment and Reporting

10. References
Rationale for Literacy in the Catholic School

A Catholic perspective on literacy recognises that the promotion of the human person is at the heart of the nature of a Catholic school. The Catholic school is committed to the development of the whole person and endeavours to respond to both the spiritual and material needs of its individuals.

Catholic schools aim at a synthesis between contemporary culture and faith with a desired outcome of bringing forth a Christian vision of the world, of life, of culture and of history. As proficiency in literacy is the key to accessing the culture and indeed accessing the experience of faith, developing literacy skills must be a priority in Catholic schooling. Literacy is a doorway into full and conscious participation in a society. Literacy allows a person to engage in the culture and become an active member of the community. The gift of literacy then enables a person to integrate their faith and life and potentially work towards the transformation of society.

A Catholic perspective on literacy recognises that liberation is a key gospel value. The gift of literacy liberates a person so that they are free from the limits of ignorance and empowered to engage more fully with life. The attainment of literacy knowledges, practices and skills liberates people and contributes towards them making meaning in everyday living and being able to live life to the fullest. Literacy development also has the potential to nurture the self esteem and confidence of a student. These are important pastoral aims of Catholic schooling and should not be undervalued. They contribute significantly to a student’s sense of worth and achievement empowering them to make better sense of their lives and respond appropriately in different contexts and situations.

When developing literacy the Catholic educator has the potential to nurture a sense of wonder and mystery in a student as together they pursue an understanding of the world around them. The world of literacy opens up to students a myriad of discoveries, a greater access to lifelong learning and the possibility of coming to a greater sense of the movement and presence of God in all creation. In this way literacy development is truly consistent with a Catholic philosophy of education.
Context

The Diocesan Literacy Statement is a response to the national and international focus on literacy as a pre-eminent concern of educators (The Literacy Challenge 1993, The National School English Literacy Survey 1996; Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools 1998). It also represents the system’s acknowledgement of the 1997 Commonwealth’s National Literacy and Numeracy goal that:

“every child leaving Primary school should be numerate and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level.”

and the sub-goal that:

“every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable Literacy and Numeracy standard within four years,”

while recognising that a very small percentage of students suffer from severe educational disabilities.

The Diocesan Literacy Statement aims to provide school personnel with a clear statement of system beliefs and expectations about literacy learning and teaching. It acknowledges the importance of on-going and systematic planning in order to deliver quality literacy programs and it affirms the commitment the system has to the development of appropriate literacy skills in all children, including those with high literacy needs.

A Diocesan Literacy Plan is required to be provided to the Catholic Education Commission on a yearly basis. The Plan is a response to the National Literacy Plan and requires each school system to outline its intended process of diagnosis, intervention and assessment of student literacy learning and proposed professional development activities.

The Diocesan Literacy Statement provides a framework to:

- assist with the implementation of Diocesan policy on literacy development for students K-12
- provide guidance and direction to schools in the implementation of quality literacy programs for all students
- inform Diocesan decision-making and planning
Defining Literacy

Contemporary understandings of literacy relate to community and workplace processes as well as to educational contexts. Consequently, literacy is no longer regarded as a set of static, isolated skills obtained at school, that people use to encode and decode printed words. Rather, literacy learning is now widely perceived as being a life-long process. Being literate has become an issue of social justice, critical as it is for full access to contemporary Australian society.

The Catholic Education Office believes that:

*Literacy is a dynamic, socially constructed phenomenon involving the integration of listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing and critical thinking. A literate individual is one who is able to utilise language in order to enhance their capacity to think, create and question and thereby to participate more effectively in their society.*

Teachers of English play a vital role in developing these skills. Literacy, however, must be supported in all subject areas. All subjects must include meaningful opportunities for students to develop and enhance their literacy skills.
Diocesan Expectations

Diocesan Expectations are that all schools will develop a whole school literacy plan which will:

- deliver programs that enable students to develop their literacy skills in a wide range of contexts and achieve their optimum competence
- allocate uninterrupted blocks of time in primary schools for the teaching of literacy
- use a range of assessment tools such as Kindergarten Screening, Observation Survey, Early Literacy Assessment (ELA), Primary Writing Assessment (PWA), Basic Skills Test (BST), English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) to identify student achievement
- use analysed assessment data to inform learning and teaching
- ensure the early identification of student literacy strengths and areas of need
- identify students who require additional literacy support, including E.S.L. and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students
- implement effective long-term intervention strategies that are challenging and purposeful
- monitor procedures to provide evidence of the success of intervention strategies
- utilise the Diocesan school review process K-12 to monitor and improve literacy programs
- plan for professional development that addresses identified needs

Diocesan Expectations are that teachers:

- utilise opportunities across the curriculum for literacy development
- develop students’ literacy skills through the integration of learning across all key learning areas K-12
- form collaborative partnerships with parents and support personnel to meet student literacy needs
- develop effective learning/teaching programs that foster students’ literacy development
Implementation Strategies

Successful implementation of the Diocesan Literacy Plan will depend on developing cooperative partnerships between systemic schools and community so that a common vision is formed which values literacy development.

DIOCESAN

The Diocese will:

- in consultation with the Heads of Cluster Services, develop the Diocesan Literacy Policy
- respond to needs expressed by schools
- provide initiatives that will support the professional development of staff
- monitor and evaluate initiatives that promote the achievement of literacy
- monitor student performance in state-based and diocesan assessment procedures

SCHOOL

Schools will:

- develop policy and practice to reflect the expectations of the Diocesan Literacy Policy
- nominate and support staff who will attend Diocesan initiatives and in turn lead professional development within their school
- monitor assessment results to identify school trends
- plan whole school, long term intervention initiatives
- inform the parent community of developments in literacy learning to increase understanding and promote shared goals and practices
- annually review school literacy plans which will be monitored as part of the school review and development process

TEACHER

Teachers will:

- develop and deliver literacy programs that reflect Diocesan and school expectations
- participate in appropriate professional development activities
- assess student performance and evaluate teaching practice in order to further enhance literacy development
**Wider Community**

The Diocesan Literacy Statement recognises the essential role of home and school partnerships in students’ learning and literacy development. A school culture that welcomes parents, values them as partners in the education enterprise and demonstrates that mutual engagement will provide improved learning outcomes for students. Widespread engagement of parents in their children’s learning is crucial to the realisation of the National Literacy and Numeracy goals.

Home-school partnerships are about teachers and parents working together to:

- develop a shared view and commitment of literacy
- encourage environments where literacy is contextual and diverse
- demonstrate mutual respect
- form equal partnerships and responsibilities to impart literacy skills and competencies
- value literacy learning in the home
- develop a coordinated supportive approach to literacy learning
- increase understandings about literacy development
- develop a variety of opportunities for participation
- work towards the promotion of common goals and practices
- become active, positive role models for students
Whole School Approach

A major purpose of the School Literacy Plan is the implementation of a cohesive approach to the on-going development of students’ literacy. Literacy goals can only be met if schools pursue a whole school, comprehensive strategy.

Effective planning and implementation requires the involvement of the whole school community. Staff need to be aware of the purpose behind any whole school planning to enable them to identify the external factors involved, the strengths and weaknesses in the current situations and the opportunities for success.

Appropriate support needs to be provided in a planned, systematic and explicit way to all students but particularly those students with high literacy needs. The role of whole school strategic planning, stage/grade planning and key learning area planning will be crucial in ensuring success. The establishment of priorities, goals and a vision for the future as well as setting high expectations for all students and teachers will ensure that the literacy needs of students are met.

School leaders play a key role in the success of literacy planning. Effective educational leaders are those who are immersed in the teaching and learning process. They are in a position to build the commitment of staff and establish the kind of organisational climate and conditions that are needed for success.

The administration of the School Literacy Plan is the responsibility of the Principal and those charged with curriculum management within the stages of the primary school and key learning areas in the secondary school. This plan will:

- recognise the value of literacy as fundamental to the achievement of educational outcomes and the imparting of Catholic values
- outline the process of collecting and analysing data on student achievement in literacy to inform teaching and learning
• provide a framework for implementing initiatives for the development of literacy
• specify the school’s aims in literacy with reference to the organisation, management and strategies employed

An effective School Literacy Plan will articulate whole-school decisions about literacy including details of:

• beliefs and shared understandings about learning and teaching
• a whole-school approach to literacy, inclusive of different needs, backgrounds and skills
• the provision for professional development for new and existing staff
• explicit teaching for literacy development
• subject-specific skills which must be taught in order to become literate
• identification procedures designed to ensure that all students at risk are recognised
• short and long term intervention procedures designed to support students with particular needs
• the roles of specialist personnel in partnership with classroom teachers in students' literacy development
• the school’s approach to home-school partnerships designed to promote literacy
• classroom and school monitoring and assessment practices
• effective communication of student achievement of literacy outcomes
Major Professional Development Initiatives

Reading Recovery

A major strategy of the Diocesan Literacy Plan is the Reading Recovery Program which commenced in 1994. Reading Recovery now operates in all Diocesan schools.

Reading Recovery is an early literacy intervention program that targets students in Year 1 who need extra literacy assistance in reading and writing. Its aim is to catch these students up with their average-achieving peers in the time available for each program (20 weeks). The instruction provided is daily and on a one-to-one basis.

For information on the implementation of the Reading Recovery program refer to:

Reading Recovery Guidelines (Third Edition 2003),
Catholic Education, Diocese of Wollongong,
available in all Diocesan primary schools

Good First Teaching

Another major component of the Diocesan Literacy Plan is the Good First Teaching professional development course for early literacy educators (Early Stage 1 and Stage 1). It has been designed to complement and support Reading Recovery programs.

The Good First Teaching course consists of ten interdependent components which examine the elements of an effective literacy program and how they inter-relate. Professional development is conducted over three school terms and then followed up in subsequent years with ‘Refresher’ sessions.

The structure of the course provides opportunities for teachers to:

- critically examine their teaching practices and their use of learning and teaching time
plan and implement balanced literacy programs that cater for a diverse range of student needs

network with colleagues from other schools

engage in collaborative enquiry that assists them to clarify their analysis and conclusions regarding students’ learning

build theoretical understandings

examine student work samples in order to hypothesise what students know, what they need to be taught next and what the most effective way of teaching them will be

observe live teaching sessions that demonstrate specific and clear instructional procedures

assess and monitor student outcomes using the Early Literacy Assessment package

Good First Teaching represents part of the system’s contribution and commitment to long term professional development aimed at providing high quality literacy instruction for all students.

For information on the implementation of the Good First Teaching course refer to:

*Good First Teaching Hand Book*

*Catholic Education, Diocese of Wollongong,*

*available in all Diocesan primary schools*
Assessment and Reporting

The purpose of assessment is to gather data that contributes to the formation of judgements by teachers in regard to student development of literacy skills. Assessment practices should improve the quality of learning for all students by effectively focusing on individual achievements and needs in a standards referenced framework.

Assessment and evaluation procedures determine the nature of the student learning provided in classrooms to achieve the competencies outlined by the Board of Studies syllabus outcomes. Assessment is, therefore, primarily school-based and teacher-developed and should involve a wide range of strategies. Teachers engage in on-going monitoring of student development through the application of formal and informal methods, including observation, conferencing, discussion, questioning, analysis of work samples, student self-assessment, interaction with parents/caregivers and the application of standardized test instruments.

Monitoring of students’ literacy levels is carried out at all stages of their education and provides the school with diagnostic information on which continuing teaching can be based. Assessment data, when shared at a diocesan level, provides valuable information for the design and provision of teacher professional development and support services. The use of external measures for this purpose also provides schools with a comparative measure against state means.

Effective and informative assessment and reporting:

- is integral to the learning and teaching program
- focuses clearly on syllabus outcomes
- is linked to standards
- is appropriate to the outcomes being assessed
- is valid, reliable, equitable and feasible
- is inclusive of varying contexts
- is planned and efficient
- values consistent teacher judgements
The Diocese has the responsibility to collect data on student literacy performance that is consistent from school to school. All schools will use the following state-based assessment procedures:

- Year 3: Basic Skills Test, Primary Writing Assessment
- Year 5: Basic Skills Test, Primary Writing Assessment
- Year 7: English Language and Literacy Assessment
- Year 10: As part of the School Certificate English: Literacy Test

In addition, school-based assessment will include details of:

- the monitoring of student progress and achievements
- plans for students with high literacy needs

As a result of on-going assessment and evaluation procedures, the school has the responsibility to report on the student’s achievements in literacy to students and parents/care givers. Each school will describe the reporting procedures in their School Literacy Plan. The Diocese has the responsibility to report student achievements against the National Literacy Benchmarks.
References

Board of Studies NSW 2002, *English Years 7-10 K Syllabus*, Board of Studies, Sydney

Board of Studies NSW 1998, *English K-6 Syllabus*, Board of Studies, Sydney


