



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

Review of Religious Education for The Catholic Education Office Diocese of Parramatta



Research Findings and Recommendations

Kevin Watson
Marguerite Maher
Gerard O'Shea
Edward Waters

School of Education
The University of Notre Dame Australia

February 2014

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary	4
Terms of Reference for the Project	5
Acknowledgements	7
List of Tables	8
Introduction	9
Summary of empirical research findings	10
Introduction to summary of literature review findings	14
Chapter 1: Catholic education, religious education and catechesis in the documents of the Church since Vatican II	16
The essential characteristics of a Catholic school	16
The nature and goals of Catholic schools: mission and identity	16
The human person and the mission of culture	17
Evangelisation	17
The community dimension	18
Respect for religious freedom	18
The primary role of the family	18
Formation of personnel	19
Teachers and catechists	19
The organisation of the curriculum	19
Catechesis and religious education	19
Trinitarian Christocentrism	20
Source and sources of divine revelation	20
Essential content	20
Methodology	21
Chapter 2: Catholic identity and mission	22
Chapter 3: Learning and teaching in religious education: incorporating an analysis of theology and educational philosophy	24
Educational philosophy	24
Theology	24
Chapter 4: Shared Christian praxis, Thomas Groome and <i>Sharing Our Story</i>	26
Some enduring insights from the work of Thomas Groome	26
<i>Sharing Our Story</i> and the Shared Christian Praxis methodology	27
Chapter 5: Content analysis: <i>Sharing Our Story</i>	29
Final Report	
Review Religious Education	
	Page 2 of 41

Chapter 6: The family	30
Summary of literature review	32
Findings from the literature review and the empirical study listed under the Terms of Reference	34
Current K-12 classroom practice and pedagogical methods in relation to religious education	34
Explore the role and effectiveness of religious education co-ordinators	35
Assess the religious literacy of students	35
Explore any link between the religious practice and the religious literacy of students	35
Provide a theological and philosophical evaluation of the content and methodology of the diocesan religious education curriculum <i>Sharing Our Story</i> against the benchmarks set in relevant educational and magisterial documents	36
Identify the formative needs of religious education teachers	38
Make recommendations for pertinent formation initiatives and religious education resources	38
Overall recommendations	40

Executive Summary

Catholic schools are unique. Not only do they deliver academic content within boundaries defined by state and federal education authorities, they also provide Christian formation for baptised Catholics and others. Catholic schools occupy a distinct place in the Catholic Church and exercise its universal mission in a particular way. Their particular mission is to nurture children's relationship with Christ and life in the Church. The Diocese of Parramatta is distinctive in its affirmation of the need for catechesis and religious education to act in synergy, in concert with formation given in the parish and family home, to fulfil this mission. However, the efficacy of the current curriculum in this process has not yet been evaluated. The extent to which the curriculum reflects contemporary and theological developments in the Church, including the liturgical emphasis of recent Popes, has also not been evaluated. This study analysed the pedagogical and theological currency and effectiveness of the curriculum using reviews of the literature, online surveys, interviews and classroom observation. The current curriculum can be improved in many ways. The evidence provided by participants indicated, as follows, that the diocese should:

- redevelop both the religious education curriculum itself and formation for the teachers using it, to better reveal the connections between faith, life and culture;
- provide ongoing professional education to religion teachers to develop their religious literacy and formation in the Catholic faith. An authentic personal relationship with Christ is crucial for religious educators to effectively deliver the curriculum;
- re-imagine the role of religious leadership in Catholic schools. It is a complex role that requires clarity around the role of the parish priest, principal and REC;
- be aware that *Sharing Our Story* has a number of limitations. It does not appropriately embody the liturgical emphases of recent Popes and the centrality of the liturgy to Christian formation. *Sharing Our Story* also does not mirror the pedagogical approach suggested by contemporary advances in theological anthropology and best practice pedagogy. Solutions should be sought; and
- develop activity-based pedagogies that are student-centred, hands-on, and provide choice.

In summary, to promote the Catholic faith as proposed by recent Popes requires a redevelopment of the curriculum and professional formation for those employed in the Diocesan Catholic education system, with a focus on integrating all the key elements of faith, life and culture.

Terms of Reference

Overview

Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta (CEDP) will conduct a review of religious education in Catholic systemic schools of the Diocese of Parramatta in 2013, with a final report submitted to Bishop Anthony Fisher OP in early 2014.

Principles

1. The review will be wide-ranging and not restricted to curriculum.
2. An academic partner will be employed to conduct the research.
3. While this will be a system review and not a review of each school, individual school contexts will be considered.
4. Key stakeholders will be consulted.
5. A steering committee will be appointed to oversee the progress of the review and report to the Parramatta Diocesan Catholic Schools Council.
6. Where feasible, partnerships with other dioceses will be fostered.

Terms of Reference

1. Examine current K-12 classroom practice and pedagogical methods in relation to RE.
2. Explore the role and effectiveness of Religious Education Co-ordinators.
3. Assess the religious literacy of students.
4. Explore any link between the religious practice and the religious literacy of students.
5. Provide a theological and philosophical evaluation of the content and methodology of the diocesan religious education curriculum *Sharing Our Story* against the benchmarks outlined in relevant educational and magisterial documents.
6. Identify the formative needs of RE teachers.
7. Make recommendations for pertinent formation initiatives and religious education resources.

Process of Review

1. Conduct face-to-face interviews with individuals and groups of current students and alumni, teachers, RECs, principals and clergy.
2. Conduct surveys of students, teachers, clergy and parents.
3. Gather data on the perception of teachers, students and parents towards religious education.
4. Make recommendations about the composition of Religious Education content and methodology.
5. Adhere to Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta processes that govern the undertaking of research in systemic schools.
6. Consult CEDP throughout the review process and present progress reports to the Evangelisation and Religious Education sub-committee.
7. Prepare an interim written report for CEDP by the end of November 2013.
8. Submit a final written report to Bishop Anthony Fisher OP by the end of February 2014.

Acknowledgements

This work was commissioned and funded by a grant from the Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Parramatta. The authors wish to acknowledge helpful contributions provided by Erin McGinty, Adra Anthony, Candice Fox, Christopher Kitching, Michelle Hilton and Linda Bellen from The University of Notre Dame Australia in writing the report and Lucy O’Connell in editing and compiling the contents.

The Evangelisation and Religious Education staff of the Parramatta Diocese Catholic Education Office should also be acknowledged for their assistance. In particular, Mr Ian Smith, Director of Evangelisation and Religious Education and Mrs Carmen Cassar Teaching Educator – Evangelisation and Religious Education deserve special mention for their continuous support and encouragement throughout the research process. Perhaps most of all, the students, parents, alumni, teachers, RECs, principals and priests who provided the data for this study should be acknowledged because without their participation this study would not have been possible.

List of Tables

Table 1	The dimensions of identity and mission	22
---------	--	----

Introduction

A programme of research was carried out to evaluate religious education curriculum employed in the Diocese of Parramatta based on the terms of reference stated earlier. This report summarises the overall findings and conclusions reached about religious education in light of the terms of reference and provides recommendations to address deficiencies where they exist. The empirical and theological components of the research are brought together to provide recommendations based on both practical and theological evaluations of the curriculum.

Summary of empirical research findings

This section summarises the results of qualitative and quantitative analyses of online survey responses and interviews. The online surveys were analysed quantitatively for closed-form questions, and qualitatively for open-response questions. The purpose of quantitative analysis was to present summary measures of a large number of perspectives in order to reliably characterise trends across groups. The purpose of qualitative analysis of the smaller number of surveys that gave responses to open-response questions was to add depth to the analysis to interpret trends. Interview data were analysed purely qualitatively. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of representative stakeholders' views of the religious education curriculum. Classroom observations served to check the fidelity of implementation of diocese-determined curriculum and school-constructed programmes as well as gain some insight into the pedagogy employed.

The on-line component of the study was divided into closed questions and open-response questions. Although the closed questions provided limited opportunity for elaborating on responses, the following trends were observed:

- More than 70% of respondents in each category of participants were Catholic.
- Each category of respondents reflected a specific and different age demographic. For example, principals over 40 years, alumni under 30, priests over 60.
- Overall Mass attendance was high (40% attending weekly).
- Large proportions of respondents in all groups prayed daily.
- Religious practice was lowest in Years 9 and 11, although 30% prayed daily.
- Priests responded less favourably to the religious education curriculum than principals or RECs.
- Core Catholic values such as:
 - following Jesus Christ
 - reading the Bible
 - helping the poor

were strongly agreed with by Years 5 and 6 students but only agreed with by Years 9 and 11.

- Similarly, alumni were more likely to strongly agree with core Catholic values compared with parents and teachers who tended to agree with them.
- Likewise, principals and RECs were more likely to strongly agree with core Catholic values compared with priests who tended to agree.
- Overall, students – even young students – clearly demonstrated they were engaged with their religion.

- On the whole, all groups that comprised the school community demonstrated they were engaged with their religion.
- Views of RECs and principals have been influenced by the Board of Studies because they are inculcated into Board practices. This is not the case for priests who have not been influenced let alone inculcated.

The on-line open-response questions yielded the following findings. In terms of faith formation there was a need for:

- on-going professional education programmes for faith-formation and religious literacy;
- greater involvement of teachers to build connections with parish and parents;
- continual study of the Catholic religion for teachers;
- social justice issues to be recognised as core but not a dominant component of Catholic knowledge and values; and
- making personal connections of biblical teachings with real life.

There were mixed responses about how well the religious education programme delivered a rich appreciation of Catholic faith. It was found that:

- religious education does a poor job because it does not connect with student daily lives;
- there was little connection with the parish;
- some students held superficial views about some aspects of the Catholic faith;
- the RE curriculum tended to be academic and disconnected from the communal aspect of the faith;
- there was a lack of critical thinking and articulation of personal interaction opportunities in the way religious education was taught; and
- religious education should make a connection between students, parents and parish, which seemed not to be achieved in the existing curriculum.

Findings indicated that collaborations between school and parish were positive. However:

- they were not a true partnership as they were based on the school rather than the parish;
- although they were positive some relationships were superficial;
- priests had difficulties connecting with students;
- relationships were more social than spiritual and they were an expectation rather than a mission; and
- although relationships between priest and principal and REC were good, relationships with the rest of school were more superficial.

Findings about the role and effectiveness of the REC were:

- the role of the REC was crucial but too large and required deep knowledge of all things Catholic across the three areas:
 - theological
 - curriculum
 - leadership
- it was widely perceived that the religious leader of the school was the REC rather than the principal;
- the REC did not want to be part of the evangelisation process and lacked time to dedicate to this task as well as training to undertake the task effectively;
- there was a lack of close links between the parish and schools with dedicated school and parish staff to promote the relationship;
- an REC responsibility would be to work with parents and parish to bring them together as one;
- there was a lack of the perception that schools were nested within the parish; and
- there was greater dissatisfaction than satisfaction with religious education programme.

The interviews with school principals and RECs followed the same question schedule and so the findings have been combined. The findings from the clergy interviews will follow separately as the questions were different. Findings listed above are not restated.

The role of the REC:

- is demanding and complex so it is difficult to get quality applicants.
- requires additional training in religion and leadership and there were mixed views about the value of the REC as a member of the school executive.
- is largely positive *apropos* liaison with the parish priest. However, the relationship is interdependent and dependent on the personality of both. The RECs and parish priests are overburdened with work, and problems can arise in such an environment.
- was difficult *apropos* staff religious formation because it required time, training and expertise.
- should be a shared responsibility with the CEO *apropos* staff religious formation.
- Is viewed as a model for all school staff and parents in prayer, liturgy and the sacraments.
- as resource manager was of concern in terms of funding, appropriateness and level of use.

The ideal religious education curriculum should be:

- student-centred, to bring students into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- taught according to an interactive, hands-on (activity-directed) pedagogy based on the teachings and mission of the Church and include prayer, liturgy and the sacraments.
- linked to the home and parish, built on personal experience and promoting social justice.

Sharing our Story, as a curriculum:

- is well-connected to the Scriptures.
- is disconnected from student real-life experiences and interests.
- is hampered by outdated resources and lack of contemporary technology and pedagogy.
- is hampered by lack of teacher knowledge and too much content.
- uses pedagogies which do not include critical thinking.
- does not accommodate a variety of faith needs.

Religious education pedagogy should:

- be authentic and delivered with energy and enthusiasm.
- be based on storytelling connected to the Gospel.
- facilitate differentiated learning.
- promote understanding, not just knowledge.
- clarify the use of the ‘praxis’ model.
- promote critical thinking and religious literacy.

Clergy interviews provided a number of findings. Those stated earlier will not be restated.

- Under current circumstances the present commitment of priests to schools is adequate.
- Priests felt more comfortable in primary schools because secondary schools had their own agendas (such as maximising Band 6 achievement) which were different to those of priests.
- The religious education curriculum was failing because students did not go to Mass.
- Priests believed that schools enkindled the Catholic faith but formation was incomplete, and there was little real understanding about the Church.
- Priests believed they should be more central to the religious life of schools.
- A priest said the religious education curriculum was over-emphasised as religious education was essentially about building relationships and almost any curriculum could do that. Religious education should be relational, not curriculum-driven.

Classroom observations served to confirm many of the findings stated above. In addition, classroom observations clarified the following issues:

- The use of technology, student personal experiences and connections with family and real life increased student engagement which subsequently increased intellectual understanding.
- Religious education, regardless of curriculum, should be taught using a range of pedagogies that engage students, are hands-on (activity directed), student-centred, provide student choice, are activity-based, relevant and promote active student participation.
- Rote learning and focusing on task completion did not promote interest in- and understanding of- the Catholic faith.

Introduction to the summary of literature review findings

Religious education in the Catholic Education system takes place in a unique context. Aside from being educational institutions which deliver curricula within parameters set by government and professional bodies, Catholic schools, unlike other schools, operate in an ecclesiological context informed by Church documents. As a part of the Church, Catholic schools carry out the universal mission of the Church in a particular way. A review of the religious education curriculum within Catholic schools cannot, therefore, be restricted to an analysis of the practical delivery of the curriculum but must include an analysis of its suitability from a theological viewpoint. Such a review must evaluate the role of a religious education curriculum in terms of:

- the Church's teaching on the relationship between catechesis and religious education;
- the theological soundness of the curriculum;
- the understanding of the human person embedded in the pedagogical approach of the curriculum; and
- the synergy between the curriculum and the formative works of other individuals and bodies with a defined mission in the Church, including the diocesan bishop, the parishes of the diocese, and the family.

Observations regarding the religious education curriculum in relation to each of these points are given in detail below. They follow a summary of the suitability of the curriculum based on an analysis of theological literature and Church documents.

The universal mission to spread the Gospel is exercised by Catholic schools specifically by nurturing the seed of the Gospel in children through word, sacrament and pastoral care. Catholic schools' ministry of word and sacrament intrinsically links them to the diocesan bishop, to whom the mission of teaching the Gospel and dispensing the sacraments is primarily entrusted. Thus, the treatment of word and sacrament in the religious education curriculum should be commensurate with the formative approach of the diocese. In the modern context, the curriculum should form in children an understanding of the Trinitarian Christocentricity embedded in liturgical participation. Analysis of *Sharing our Story* suggests that this curriculum does not deal adequately with significant aspects of these issues. It is also suggested that pedagogical approaches better reflecting this understanding of human learning should be introduced into curriculum delivery. These could also include the memorisation of key liturgical texts to promote a deeper experience of liturgical mystagogy. Although rote learning, in itself, is not regarded as an effective pedagogical strategy, it can be useful if used creatively in the context of broader contemporary pedagogical methods.

The religious education curriculum must act in synergy with catechesis. While the Church has clearly distinguished religious education from catechesis, this distinction does not imply that a school does not play a specific role in the work of catechesis. Religious education is defined as a subject with the same systematic demands and rigour as other disciplines, while the goal of catechesis is to foster a relationship with Christ and ongoing induction into the life of the Church. The curriculum should cooperate with catechesis and *vice versa* in mutual enrichment. This cooperation must be sensitive to the needs of both Christian and non-Christian students. Catholic schools must respect the religious freedom of persons. Within this proviso, the Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel; to offer is not to impose. For students who are non-believers, religious education assumes the character of a missionary proclamation of the Gospel and is ordered to a decision of faith. For students who believe, catechesis and religious education are more fully integrated. The best example of this is the reliance of each, in its own way, on liturgical participation, which is the common focus of all modes of Christian formation.

The religious education curriculum must also interact with the formative initiatives employed in other arms of the Church, including the parish and the family. As the primary ministers of the sacraments, parish priests must play a vital role in explaining and celebrating the liturgy, which is key to the effectiveness of the curriculum as a tool for Christian formation. They should not only minister the sacraments of Christian initiation that Catholic students receive as part of their entry into full liturgical participation, but must make participation in Mass a more regular component of the curriculum.

Parents are the primary educators of their children and for this reason schools are bound by the law of subsidiarity in respect to the education of students. The boundaries of the school's role should be clearly defined in all documentation regarding the curriculum to ensure that the primary role of parents is respected. To promote a better understanding of the complementary roles of parents, schools, and parishes programmes and workshops should be developed. These should have the goal of ensuring that the religious education curriculum informs- and is informed by- the formation offered by other parts of the Church.

Chapter 1

Catholic Education, Religious Education and Catechesis in the Documents of the Church since Vatican II

The Essential Characteristics of a Catholic School

The Nature and Goals of Catholic Schools – Mission and Identity

- The Church has three primary responsibilities: proclaiming the word; celebrating the sacraments; and exercising the ministry of charity.
- The mission of the Catholic school embraces all three of these dimensions and is described as part of the evangelising mission of the Church based on the Great Commission of Christ himself: “Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.”
- Catholic schools are institutionally linked to the bishop of the diocese who has the responsibility for their proper functioning.
- The Catholic school is a place of integral education of the human person and its particular project is the synthesis of faith, culture and life. It works towards this goal by a Christian vision of reality.
- The religious climate of the school is expressed through the celebration of Christian values in word and sacrament.
- The Catholic educational project seeks always to work in harmony with the nature of the human person as revealed in Christ.
- The Catholic school can never take a position of neutrality with regard to Christian values or what it means to be human.
- There are four distinctive characteristics of a Catholic school:
 1. Its distinctive educational climate;
 2. Its emphasis on the personal development of each student;
 3. Its emphasis on the relationship between the Gospel and the culture;
 4. Its illumination of all knowledge with light of faith.

- Catholic schools have a particular concern for the poor and the weak. They also have an ecumenical dimension.
- The project of Catholic education is long-term, so the value of Catholic schools cannot always be measured in terms of immediate efficiency.

The Human Person and the Mediation of Culture

- Any genuine educational philosophy must account for both the physical and spiritual powers of each individual human person, looking to Christ Himself as the fullness of humanity.
- The Catholic school aims to bring faith, culture and life into harmony and to guide students through a critical and systematic assimilation of culture.
- The religious dimension is intrinsic to culture and contributes to the formation of the person.

Evangelisation

- The Church sees the its entire activity as an expression of the love that seeks the good of every human being, and this is brought about by means of evangelisation through word and sacrament.
- The Church exists to evangelise – to preach and teach and to be a channel of grace, reconciling sinners with God and perpetuating Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass.
- There are three broad socio-religious contexts for evangelisation:
 1. Those who have never known the Christian message
 2. Those fervent in their faith
 3. Those who have lost a living sense of their faith – New Evangelisation.
- Evangelisation proceeds on a continuum of four stages:
 1. Christian witness, dialogue and presence in charity
 2. Proclamation of the Gospel and the call to conversion
 3. The catechumenate and Christian initiation
 4. The formation of Christian communities through- and by means of- the sacraments and their ministers.
- Catholic schools have an important role to play with those committed to their care and are reminded that catechetical instruction must not be neglected as a means of evangelisation.
- Those involved in evangelisation do so primarily by means of their Christian witness. The initial presence in charity, however, must eventually result in the explicit presentation of the Gospel message.

The Community Dimension

- The community dimension plays a very important role in the project of Catholic education. This is a theological concept: eternal mystery, revealed in Christ, of the communion of love that is the very life of God – the Holy Trinity.
- A Catholic education can only be carried out authentically in a relational community context because its purpose is to make human beings more human.
- There are two dimensions to a genuine relational community – one with God and the other towards one another.
- An important purpose of a Catholic school is that students learn to overcome individualism by living in solidarity with Christ.
- The Church, and by extension, the Catholic school, has a role to play in promoting justice. This role must be placed in the overall context of its mission, which is multi-dimensional.

Respect for Religious Freedom

- In Catholic schools, the religious freedom of non-Catholic pupils must be respected.
- The service offered to non-Catholics in Catholic schools is one of practical charity, freely given. It is not pursued for any other purpose.
- For students who are non-believers, religious education assumes the character of a missionary proclamation of the Gospel and is ordered to a decision of faith.
- A Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel; to offer is not to impose.

The Primary Role of the Family

- Parents are the primary educators of their children and for this reason the school is bound by the law of subsidiarity in respect of the education of their own children.
- Schools need to provide concrete support to parents to enable them to fulfil this role. This includes meetings and programmes to equip them for their task.

Formation of Personnel

Teachers and Catechists

- The effectiveness of the religious education programme is closely tied to the personal witness given by teachers.
- Teachers must have a solid professional formation. Inadequacy in this area undermines the success of their work with students and their ability to witness to their faith.
- As in other subject areas, religious education teachers must continually update their professional qualifications.
- Religious education teachers should have a personal commitment to their role enabling them to carry it out in communion with Christ.
- Those responsible for hiring teachers and administrators in Catholic schools are advised to take account of the faith lives of those they are hiring.
- All teachers in a Catholic school should be sensitive to opportunities for allowing students to see beyond the limited horizon of human reality.
- Catholic educators need a formation of the heart as well as the mind if they are to contribute effectively to the project of religious education.
- When lay people work in this field, it is by way of invitation to cooperate more closely with the apostolate of the bishops – a mandate of an apostolic undertaking.

The Organisation of the Curriculum

Catechesis and Religious Education

- The Church insists on a distinction between religious education and catechesis. In the context of a school, religious education needs to be seen as a subject with the same systematic demands and rigour as other disciplines.
- The definitive aim of catechesis, on the other hand, is intimacy with Christ and ongoing induction into the life of the Church.
- What is proposed here is a distinction, not a formal separation of the two tasks.
- In the Church's view, the distinction between religious education and catechesis does not change the fact that a school can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis.

- A suitable analogy for the distinction would be the cooperation of the left and right hands – each one with a different role to play but working together.

Trinitarian Christocentrism

- Jesus Christ not only transmits the word of God, He is the Word of God. The project of educating in the Catholic faith is therefore completely tied to Him.
- Christ leads us to the innermost mystery of God – the Holy Trinity, the central mystery of Christian faith and life.
- Every authentic mode of presentation of the Christian message must always be Trinitarian Christocentric: Through Christ to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.
- “If you see charity, you see the Trinity” – St Augustine.

Source and Sources of Divine Revelation

- The proclamation of the Good News draws its content from the Word of God transmitted in Tradition and Scriptures.
- Jesus Christ Himself is the mediator and fullness of revelation, while Scripture and Tradition are the authentic sources of our knowledge of Christ.
- The Scriptures, read with the mind of the Church, are given a particular emphasis in the project of Catholic education.
- There is a vital relationship, set forth in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, between the Scriptures and Tradition, so teachers need careful training in both.

Essential Content

- The curriculum of the Catholic school should not be fragmented; the religious dimension is not some kind of superstructure, it is integral to being human.
- *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* is mandated as the standard reference for doctrinal presentations.
- An outline of the essential content of a programme of religious education cannot be briefly summarised, and readers are referred to the main body of the text for details.
- The outlines provided make a two-fold division of content: the Christ-event and message; and the Christian Life.

Methodology

- The Church does not specify a particular methodology for religious education and catechesis; a variety of methods are encouraged.
- No methodology, however effective, can dispense with the part played by the teacher, whose own life must give witness to the message proclaimed.
- The purpose of any catechetical methodology is to fix in the memory, intelligence and the heart the essential truths that must permeate the whole of life.
- Teachers are encouraged to ensure that certain basic ideas are committed to memory through appropriate educational means.
- The texts that are committed to memory should be gradually understood in depth, to become a source of personal and communal Christian life.
- Methods selected should account for the differing ages and other needs of the students.
- Discovery is cited as an important pedagogical tool and accords with the realist philosophical view of the existence of objective reality, as opposed to subjectivist and relativist interpretations.
- Technology and the media of social communication should be incorporated into the programme. Nevertheless, there is a personal dimension which these media cannot replace, and this must be borne in mind.

Chapter 2

Catholic Identity and Mission

- Identity is about maintaining consistency with the Church, and mission with responding to contemporary circumstances. Ormerod's table can serve as a useful summary of the different dimensions and tasks of Identity and Mission.

Table 1 The dimensions of identity and mission

	Identity	Mission
Religious	Prayer, liturgy, belief, sacraments	Christian conversion, public witness to faith
Moral	Moral expectations for community life	Moral witness, moral challenge
Cultural	Theology, moral thought, artistic expression, Christian literature	Cultural dialogue, challenge and critique
Social	Christian community living, local parish, Christian groups	Social justice, outreach to the needy and marginalised

- The focus of identity and mission changes according to developmental levels:
 - Primary: Basics of Catholic religious, moral, cultural and social identity
 - Secondary: Some attention to social mission of the Church;
moral identity in relation to sexuality as they enter adolescence
 - Tertiary: Cultural and social mission of the Church
- The Church must address the reality of advanced secularisation and counter it by:
 - a renewed emphasis on the Mass and other communal rituals.
 - providing attractive opportunities for young adults to deepen their faith and strengthen their identification and commitment.
- If the disabled are not valued this may indicate that others are only welcomed conditionally also. If the school is Catholic in its identity, then part of its mission is to ensure that every child counts.

- Since religious faith requires, primarily, a real assent, students are more likely to need concrete experiences rather than abstract ones.
- Unless the faith has been concretely established, abstract speculations are more likely to undermine faith than promote it.
- Critical thinking has an important role in intellectual formation, but it cannot be fairly applied to the revealed data of faith.

Chapter 3

Learning and Teaching in Religious Education: Incorporating an Analysis of Theology and Educational Philosophy

Educational Philosophy

- In terms of educational philosophy, there are many contemporary teaching practices which have proved both effective and compatible with the Church's teaching. They could be profitably employed as part of religious education teaching methodology. The following is a list of effective practices described in the report:
 - Self-reported grades
 - Developmentally-appropriate programmes
 - Formative evaluation
 - Microteaching
 - Reciprocal teaching
 - Research into effective teacher-student relationships
 - Spaced practice rather than massed practice
 - The impact of movement on learning and cognition
 - Choice and perceived control.
 - Inadequacy of extrinsic rewards and motivation
 - Learning from peers

- Inquiry/project-based learning has a place in religious education as a tool for further investigation.

Theology

- By analogy, Trinitarian Christocentricity allows us to see faith, hope and charity as a completion of the classic transcendental properties of human being: truth, beauty and goodness.

- The liturgy provides a clue as to how the persons of the Trinity are related analogically to human learning – beginning with Jesus (the body), in the communion of the Holy Spirit (the heart) to the Father (the mind).

- Human beings are taught most effectively when their natural order of learning is respected – body, heart and mind.

- Religious education for the body requires an ‘attentive gaze at reality’ in a way that evokes a sense of wonder. Concrete starting points (or at least examples) are always to be preferred if they are available.
- The purpose of the concrete in religious education is to point in the direction of a spiritual reality beyond.
- The religious education of the heart is best pursued through personal experience of being loved, followed by self-chosen reflection on the Scriptures.
- Religious education of the mind is the culmination rather than the starting point. It requires the compression of experiences unto understandable statements, which need to be remembered.

Chapter 4

Shared Christian Praxis, Thomas Groome and *Sharing Our Story*

Some enduring Insights from the Work of Thomas Groome

In terms of the current challenges facing religious education, Groome offers valuable insights, including the following:

- In responding to the challenges of contemporary pluralism, we must make efforts to ground people in their own traditions without disrespecting the views of others.¹
- We need to strike a balance between two inauthentic poles in religious education programmes – *rationalism* and *fideism*.²
- We need to use pedagogies that allow participants to seek a correlation between faith and life.³
- We need to ensure that families and communities are vitally involved in the religious education process.⁴
- Groome has been a vocal advocate for the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, insisting that it “...is inspiring creators of religious education curricula to tell ‘the whole story’ of Catholicism rather than remain mired in their favourite parts.”⁵
- Educators should “...attend to our own growth toward holiness of life,” since, he says, you cannot share what you don’t have.⁶
- “Be clear about our purposes as religious educators”.⁷ We must “...form, inform and transform,” in a way that allows people to become disciples of Christ.⁸

¹ See Groome, Thomas. “Remembering and Imagining,” *Religious Education* Fall, 2003, 98, 4, 518

² Groome, Thomas. “Remembering and Imagining,” *Religious Education* Fall, 2003, 98, 4, 518

³ Groome, Thomas. “Remembering and Imagining,” *Religious Education* Fall, 2003, 98, 4, 519

⁴ Groome, Thomas. “Remembering and Imagining,” *Religious Education* Fall, 2003, 98, 4, 519

⁵ Gibeau, Dawn “Catechism is reinvigorating Catholic schools, author says.” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 31, 1995, 31, 22. P. 21

⁶ Groome, Thomas. “Advice to Beginners and Myself,” *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, November 2007, 102:4, 362.

⁷ Groome, Thomas. “Advice to Beginners and Myself,” *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, November 2007, 102:4, 363.

- There are some truth claims that stand at the core, and it is these that “...must be re-presented faithfully and persuasively by its religious educators.”⁹
- “We need to know the culture of the people with whom we work and get to know them personally, including their names.”¹⁰
- If we want students to learn *from*- and ground their spiritual identity in- the tradition, we need to support “...faith communities and families, proactively engaging their shared life as curriculum.”¹¹
- “We must constantly reflect upon and try to improve our approach to doing religious education.”¹² This is described as a “life to Faith to life” approach.¹³
- We should not burden ourselves with the responsibility for achieving our goals, but “balance our own best efforts with the memory of God’s grace.”¹⁴

Sharing Our Story and the Shared Christian Praxis Methodology

The Shared Christian Praxis methodology of *Sharing Our Story* has some advantages:

- It can encourage those committed to their faith to live thoroughly the challenges of the Gospel in their own lives.
- It attempts to engage the whole personality, incorporating cognitive, affective and volitional within an embodied existence.
- It encourages practical reflection on one’s circumstances.

There are also some significant difficulties which have been detailed in the report:

⁸ Groome, Thomas. “Advice to Beginners and Myself,” *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, November 2007, 102:4, 363.

⁹ Groome, Thomas. “Advice to Beginners and Myself,” *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, November 2007, 102:4, 364.

¹⁰ Groome, Thomas. “Advice to Beginners and Myself,” *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, 102:4, 364.

¹¹ Groome, Thomas. “Advice to Beginners and Myself,” *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, November 2007, 102:4, 365.

¹² Groome, Thomas. “Advice to Beginners and Myself,” *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, November 2007, 102:4, 365.

¹³ Groome, Thomas. “Advice to Beginners and Myself,” *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, November 2007, 102:4, 365.

¹⁴ Groome, Thomas. “Advice to Beginners and Myself,” *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association*, November 2007, 102:4, 366.

- There are significant difficulties with aspects of its underlying theological anthropology as received from Thomas Groome;
- The methodology of *Sharing Our Story* lacks sophistication in relation to the two dimensions of faith – as a personal assent to truth and a received theological virtue;
- *Sharing Our Story* tends to take a position of neutrality in relation to the deposit of faith;
- The methodology of *Sharing Our Story* does not reflect the Trinitarian Christocentricity now considered essential in the presentation of the Catholic faith;
- The methodology of *Sharing Our Story* seems to work in reverse order to the natural learning process of body/heart/mind. It begins with the mind (mental analysis of naming the present action), moves to the heart (stories and visions) then to the body (planning for future action).
- The methodology of *Sharing Our Story* makes no provision for ensuring that certain key texts are committed to memory and are gradually understood in depth, to become a source of Christian life on the personal and community levels.¹⁵
- The methodology of *Sharing Our Story* makes no provision for the different developmental needs of students of different ages; it is the same from Kindergarten to Year 12.
- Certain strategies of *Sharing Our Story* have been called into question by contemporary educational practice. The following effective teaching practices are either absent or only practised in a very rudimentary form:
 - Self-reported grades
 - Developmentally-appropriate programmes
 - Formative evaluation
 - Spaced practice rather than massed practice
 - The impact of movement on learning and cognition.
 - Choice and perceived control.
- On balance, it is recommended that a new teaching and learning strategy, in keeping with both effective contemporary practices in learning and teaching as well as the Catholic vision of the human person (as this is now understood) should be developed. Pope Francis I has recently indicated the preferred direction for this in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 166.

¹⁵ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), 154. Op.cit.

Content Analysis: *Sharing Our Story*

- *Sharing Our Story* has been examined in a document produced for assessing content. Entitled, “Essential Content for Organic Presentation of the Catholic Faith,” the document was created from magisterial sources.
- It is recommended that this document be widely reviewed and modified if necessary by competent authorities within the Diocese of Parramatta, to ensure that it accurately reflects the content deemed appropriate for the Religious Education Programme of the Diocese.
- A document offering some observations of the content analysis can be found in the report. The omissions and inclusions have been set out in detail and are summarised in a table at the end of the document. This can be used to inform discussion at a local level.
- Some issues may need to be addressed directly in the review of the Religious Education Programme in terms of apparent omissions from *Sharing Our Story*:
 - Provision needs to be made for the incorporation of suitable aspects of memorisation, as required by *Catechesis Tradendae*.
 - In view of the strong emphasis given to the essential role of the Sacraments and Liturgical Mystagogy in the works of Pope Francis I, it would appear that a greater emphasis should be placed on these aspects of the programme.
 - The appropriate integration of the Creed as a key element of the programme needs some attention.
 - A greater integration of the Liturgy and the Scriptures is called for in the recent documents of the Church – particularly, *Verbum Domini*, *Lumen Fidei* and *Evangelii Gaudium*.
 - The organisation of the programme as a series of units does not reflect good practice either in contemporary educational theory or the traditional liturgical organisation used by the Church. It seems that a sophisticated ‘spiral curriculum’ would be needed in order to address these issues.

The Family

Church documents propose that:

- School documentation acknowledge and explain the scope and limits of the principle of subsidiarity in relation to the rights and duties of parents.
- Schools offer parents appropriate opportunities for education in their role including meetings and programmes to equip them for the task.
- Schools promote the roles of both mother and father and help them to understand the necessary fruitful tension between the two parenting roles.
- School documentation promote the idea of *communio* – a family of God united by mutual charity and made one through the worship of the Trinity.
- Families and parishes need to support their schools support their schools in their efforts to maintain a strong Catholic identity.
- Families need to support their schools as centres of the New Evangelisation.
- The Catholic school help young people, teachers and families to grow in their knowledge and love for the Catholic tradition.
- Catholic schools involve parents and families in the process of evangelising and catechising their children, seeking also to educate those families in the faith.
- Schools seek to make progress towards an increase in the proportion of students who are from poorer families.
- Catholic schools explain to parents the need for healthy sibling relationships.
- Catholic school make it known that parental relationship is more important than IQ or socio-economic status in promoting the happiness of their children.

- Catholic schools offer hope to those living in dysfunctional families: what goes right in a person's life is more important than what goes wrong.
- Catholic schools promote community involvement and encourage them to form connections with others.
- Catholic schools promote the truth that caring for others enhances our own happiness.
- Those involved in the building of the school community need to promote:
 - unity and common ground among those involved
 - care and compassion
 - parental partnership
 - strong connections with the parish community
 - genuine dialogue to meet the real needs of the school community
- At a diocesan level:
 - policy guidelines need to be developed in respect of the Catholic school as a community
 - professional development needs to be offered to principals and school communities regarding to promote community building and parent participation.

Summary of literature review

The mission to spread the Gospel to all peoples is entrusted to the whole Church, but the Catholic school exercises this mission in a very particular way. Schools are responsible for nurturing the seed of the Gospel in children, through word, sacrament and pastoral care. Catholic schools' ministry of word and sacrament in particular situates them firmly as accountable to the bishop, to whom the mission of teaching the gospel and dispensing the sacraments is primarily entrusted. In summary, the Catholic school is a particular manifestation of the universal mission of the Church of Evangelisation. This mission touches on the religious education curriculum in three main ways. First, for Catholic school students who are baptised Christians, what is the relationship between the religious education curriculum and catechesis? Second, for Catholic school students who are not Christian, what is the relationship between the curriculum and evangelisation? Third, how does the curriculum relate to formative initiatives employed in other wings of the Church, including the parish and the family?

The Church has clearly distinguished religious education from catechesis. Religious education is a subject with the same systematic demands and rigour as other disciplines. The goal of catechesis is to foster a relationship with Christ and ongoing induction into the life of the Church. In the Church's view, the distinction between religious education and catechesis does not change the fact that a school can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis. The distinction does, however, leave the way open for Catholic schools to implement programmes of religious education and catechesis using a variety of models and in diverse ways, provided the synergistic potential of these two areas is not neglected. The curriculum should cooperate with catechesis and *vice versa* in a mutually enriching way. The fact that the Church does not mandate particular models for integrating these two aspects of formation of the person means that there is great potential for developing the Diocese's curriculum based on the findings of this review.

Catholic schools must respect the religious freedom of persons. Within this proviso, the Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel; to offer is not to impose. For students who are non-believers, religious education assumes the character of a missionary proclamation of the Gospel and is ordered to a decision of faith.

Parents are the primary educators of their children, and, for this reason, the school is bound by the law of subsidiarity in respect of the education of their own children. Similarly, the diocesan bishop is the primary instructor of all Catholics under his care. Formative initiatives within the Catholic school must therefore cooperate with formation offered by parents and the diocese in a synergistic fashion. This may

extend to offering programmes and workshops regarding the formative activities of schools to ensure that these are informed by and inform the formation offered by other parts of the Church.

Findings from the literature review and the empirical study listed under the terms of reference

Current K-12 classroom practice and pedagogical methods in relation to religious education

The current religious education programme makes either little or no use of a number of practices regarded as pedagogically valuable. These include the use of:

- self-reported grades;
- developmentally-appropriate training;
- formative evaluation;
- micro-teaching;
- spaced practice rather than massed practice;
- the impact of movement on learning and cognition;
- choice and perceived control; and
- learning from peers.

With regard to the specifically formative aspects of participation in a Catholic religious education curriculum, pedagogical aspects that need attention are the use of a strategy of memorising key texts. This method fosters contemplation of the truths contained therein, and follows the natural order of learning suggested in the theological literature – body, heart and mind. It can be undertaken in ways that interest and motivate students as a component of broader contemporary pedagogies.

The ideal religious education curriculum should:

- encourage students to form a personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
- be taught using student-centred pedagogy that is interactive, hands-on and based on the mission of the Church and include prayer, liturgy and the sacraments; and
- be linked to the home and parish, built on personal experience of justice and charity.

Religious education pedagogy should:

- be Trinitarian and Christocentric;
- follow a mystagogical model, emphasising the complementary roles of Liturgy and the Scriptures;
- acknowledge the centrality of relationship with Christ as the motive for moral agency and for prayer;
- promote commitment and understanding not just knowledge;
- promote critical thinking and religious literacy;

- include the use of technology, student personal experiences and connections with family and real-life increased student engagement which subsequently increases intellectual understanding;
- regardless of curriculum, be taught using a range of pedagogies that engage students, are hands-on, student-centred, provide student choice, are activity-based, relevant and promote active student participation; and
- reconsider the ‘unit model’ as a basis for curriculum development by replacing it with a ‘spiral model’ which responds to the liturgical cycle and develop essential themes at a deeper level over the years of schooling.

Explore the role and effectiveness of Religious Education Co-ordinators

The effectiveness of religious education coordinators is strongly linked to their formation. The task of delivering the religious education curriculum is a participation in the ministry of the bishop. As such, religious education teachers have a mandate to perform an apostolic undertaking. Their formation should have similarities with the formation of others who perform key roles in the mission of the Church. The role of the REC requires deep knowledge of all things Catholic across theological, curriculum and leadership dimensions. Nevertheless, there are limits to what can be expected of the role. The role has to be sustainable. It may be that the role has to be recast rather than be continuously expanded with increasing demands placed on the REC’s time and expertise. The recast process would involve a review of the relationship between the REC, school community and parish.

Assess the religious literacy of students

There were differing views about what constituted ‘religious literacy.’ Some participants thought it referred to a student’s ability to read and relate the religious education curriculum as identified by tests. Others thought ‘religious literacy’ was the ability to know and understand religion and so be able to view religion, and in particular the Catholic faith, within the context of broader social and cultural frameworks.

Priests believed that schools enkindled the Catholic faith but, but that faith formation was incomplete, and little was really understood about the Church. Principals and RECs generally thought the religious education curriculum was performing reasonably well although there was considerable room for improvement. They were of the view that because students went to Mass and were able to relate to biblical teachings that their ‘religious literacy’ was good. It could be argued that the measure, inadvertently being used, was underdeveloped and did not reflect a mature view of ‘religious literacy’. Consequently, this study is not able to provide any great insights into the ‘religious literacy’ of students.

Explore any link between the religious practice and the religious literacy of students

This study can only report observations and the opinions of participants. It is beyond the brief of this study to conduct trials and develop understandings that do not seem to be in the minds of participants. Although it is part of good research practice to probe for understandings and attempt to establish the

reliability of the information collected from participants, it is not normal practice to question information. At the outset, it is important to restate that there was no common view among participants of what was meant by the term religious literacy. Hence, although information about the religious practice of students was observed and reported by participants any link to student religious literacy is tenuous. It was reported that Mass attendance and personal prayer was high among students with the religious practice of years 9 and 11 students lower than for younger students.

Overall, younger students more strongly agreed with core Catholic values compared with older students. Principals and RECs thought the religious practices of students were strong while priests thought they were not as strong. Nevertheless, all groups that composed the school community demonstrated they were engaged with their religion. This was despite the fact that it did not directly connect with their daily lives or with their parish. It was also felt that religious education, as experienced in schools lacked a communal or social context because relationships and relationship building was not a significant part of the curriculum. Consequently, although students were thought to be engaged with their religion this did not extend to participation in the Eucharist on Sunday. Hence, religious education as experienced in schools did nurture the Catholic faith in students although it left their formation incomplete.

Provide a theological and philosophical evaluation of the content and methodology of the diocesan religious education curriculum *Sharing Our Story* against the benchmarks outlined in relevant educational and magisterial documents

The *Sharing Our Story* curriculum was evaluated using the document “Essential Content for Organic Presentation of the Catholic Faith.” There were several theological and methodological aspects of the curriculum that were found to require attention in order to be more effective. The underlying theological anthropology of *Sharing our Story* is problematic. The methodology of *Sharing Our Story* demonstrates a lack of sophistication by failing to clearly distinguish the two dimensions of faith. Faith is both a personal assent to truth and a received theological virtue. *Sharing Our Story* tends to take a position of neutrality in relation to the deposit of faith, and seems to work in reverse order to the natural learning process of body/heart/mind. It begins with the mind (mental analysis of naming the present action), moves to the heart (stories and visions) then to the body (planning for future action). The methodology of *Sharing Our Story* is also somewhat dated as it does not reflect the Trinitarian Christocentricity now considered essential in the presentation of the Catholic faith. Particular areas of *Sharing our Story* that could be improved in the short term include introducing the commitment to memory of some key texts, a greater emphasis on the Creed, more emphasis upon the role of the sacraments and a clearer integration of Scripture and Liturgy.

It was also found that the following benchmarks should be used when evaluating a Catholic religious education curriculum:

- Ensure that the Religious Education Program Content covers all of the required areas

recommended in the documents of the Church. These should be assigned in roughly even proportions for each of the four key areas covered by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

- Doctrine and Beliefs;
 - Sacraments, Liturgy and Worship;
 - Moral Formation and Social Action; and
 - Prayer.
- Ensure that the underlying assumptions about the nature of the human person are in conformity with contemporary Catholic teaching in philosophical and theological anthropology.
 - Move to a Trinitarian Christocentric model which accounts for the needs of body, heart and mind in an educationally sound sequence and using aspects of contemporary technology and pedagogy where appropriate.
 - Allow students to discover the connections between their own lives, the good news offered by the Gospel and a deep personal relationship with Christ.
 - Ensure that programmes allow the students to discover the mystical connection between their own lives, the Sacramental Mysteries and the Sacred Scriptures. Promote ongoing participation in the Holy Eucharist and the other sacraments of the Church.
 - Ensure provision is made for committing to memory key teachings about doctrine, sacraments, moral/social teaching and prayer. This should be done as a culmination of the process rather than a starting point.
 - Ensure that both aspects of faith (as a personal assent and as a gift of God) are incorporated into the programme. It should help students to explore the relationship between reason (critical thinking) and faith.
 - Promote the need for Catholic faith to be lived in a *communio* which is capable of expressing the bonds of mutual charity.
 - Offer practical support to parents by acknowledging the principle of subsidiarity and offering practical support for them to fulfil their God-given role.
 - Ensure that opportunities for prayer are offered every day, and that students be encouraged to cultivate a genuine prayer life of their own.
 - Ensure that students are offered an adequate moral formation – for body, heart and mind – and be offered age-appropriate opportunities for expressing this in moral agency and social action.
 - Ensure that the RE programme offers both Religious Education (systematic exposition of content) and Catechesis (personal and affective formation within a *communio*.) The documents of the Church distinguish between the two, but do not envisage a complete separation of these components within the context of a Catholic school.

Identify the formative needs of religious education teachers

As with RECs, the effectiveness of religious education teachers and catechists is related to their own spiritual health.

- Those responsible for hiring teachers and administrators in Catholic schools are advised to take account of the faith life of those they are hiring.
- Catholic educators need a formation of the heart as well as the mind if they are to contribute effectively to the project of religious education. This formation of heart presupposes a personal commitment to the role of religious educator, enabling teachers to carry out their role in communion with Christ.

Aside from the faith dimension, to deliver the religious education curriculum effectively, teachers must be thoroughly formed professionally and continually update their skills as educators. Pursuing post-graduate qualifications may play a role in this. Consequently, the formative needs of religious education teachers should involve:

- on-going professional education programmes for faith formation and religious literacy;
- greater involvement of teachers to build local community;
- continual study about the Catholic religion for teachers;
- social justice issues being recognised as core, but not dominant, component of Catholic knowledge and values;
- personal connections of biblical teachings with real life;
- the allocation of time and expertise for staff religious formation;
- a shared responsibility with the CEO; and
- being a role model for students and parents in prayer, liturgy and the sacraments.

Make recommendations for pertinent formation initiatives and religious education resources

- Teachers of RE must continually update their professional qualifications, both with formal qualifications through approved courses and CEO based initiatives, conferences, guest speakers etc.
- Explore practical ways of making a programme of ongoing formation available to RE teachers, including suitable online options.
- Catholic educators need a formation of the heart as well as the mind if they are to contribute effectively to the project of religious education. Explore ways for RE teachers to develop an affective engagement with the faith. Offer RE teachers opportunities to be released from classes sometimes to participate in
 - pilgrimages,
 - retreat days,
 - work with the outreach projects of the local parish

- immersion-work with those involved in aspects of the Catholic apostolate etc.
- As the work of the REC is an extension of the apostolate of the bishop, explore ways to increase the direct personal involvement of the bishop in the ongoing formation of the REC.
- In the implementation of a renewed curriculum of Religious Education, introduce changes in stages, each supported by suitable resources and PD.
- Require schools to demonstrate that a proportion of the global budget has been assigned to Religious Education needs.

Overall Recommendations

1. Religious education ‘needs to be and needs to be seen to be’ a priority in the Catholic community at every level: parishes, schools, families and systemic authorities. Structures and support need to be in place commensurate with this belief.
2. A deep personal relationship with Christ is to be encouraged in religious education teachers and coordinators, as authenticity is crucial to the effective delivery of a religious education curriculum. Resources need to be prioritised to enable this, beginning with the proclamation of the kerygma.
3. A collaboration of genuine substance between the school and parish should be developed. The parish priest necessarily plays an indispensable role that must be emphasised and broadened. The vocation of priests places them at the heart of religious education.
4. The demands of religious leadership exercised by the Principal, Assistant Principal and Religious Education Co-ordinator should be examined and clarified. The structure of the school does not support the role of the REC as currently envisioned.
5. Professional learning for all staff should be a systematic programme that makes explicit the contribution of each member of staff to the mission of Catholic schooling. Resources, including time for professional development and spiritual formation, need to be prioritised to enable this.
6. Additional work will be needed to accurately assess what is meant by the term ‘religious literacy’ and how it manifests in the student population. The diverse interpretations of the term ‘religious literacy’ made this a difficult area to assess given the scope of the study. If religious literacy is taken to mean an understanding of the Catholic faith in the context of broad social and cultural frameworks, the religious literacy of students was less than respondents expected.
7. The religious education curriculum should cater for diverse learning needs of students irrespective of religious affiliation. In this way, religious education will be both evangelistic and catechetical.

8. The present religious education curriculum is ‘unit-based’ where content is organised around themes. In keeping with contemporary curriculum theory, where student learning is connected to ‘real life’ experiences, consideration should be given to a ‘spiral’ curriculum developing key themes with increasing rigour over time.
9. *Sharing Our Story* does not adequately embody the sacramental emphases of recent Popes. Solutions should be investigated which offer a religious education curriculum that proceeds from the foundation of sacramental / liturgical mystagogy.
10. *Sharing Our Story* does not appear to have been particularly successful in helping students to develop their own ongoing commitment to the Catholic faith. Careful consideration needs to be given to ways which enhance religious literacy, personal commitment and meaningful participation in the Eucharist.
11. Contemporary pedagogical practice indicates there is more than one way to teach religious education. When implementing the aims and content of religious education outlined in magisterial documents, the integration of research-based best practice and specifically developed approaches to learning in religious education should be undertaken.