Building Levy Annual Statement 2012
Parramatta Diocesan Catholic Schools Council

**FROM THE BISHOP**

My dear people,

Each year, our families contribute to the Diocesan School Building Levy, which is a vital source of funding for our school communities. The Building Levy ensures the ongoing maintenance of existing school buildings and facilities, and allows for the development of new schools or of new facilities for growing schools. The Building Levy enables us to direct funding to areas of greatest need in the Diocese, particularly to support those communities with limited resources.

We recognize great appreciation, the significant contribution of the previous Federal Government’s Building the Education Revolution program to capital works in our schools and financial contributions of the State government. It is universally recognized that the Catholic sector in general, and in the Diocese of Parramatta, in particular, obtained great value for money from these grants. However, there is still great uncertainty about funding of capital works for the Catholic sector.

A freeze to the Building (Ex-UA Assistance) Scheme (BEAS) has resulted in a significantly diminished funding pool for capital projects from 2013. The impact on our Diocese is a funding shortfall of about $20 million and reduces our ability to respond to the growth in demand for Catholic schooling and the building of new Catholic schools in the Diocese.

In determining the projects that will be undertaken each year, the Parramatta Diocesan Catholic Schools Council, under the chair of Bishop Anthony Fisher O’M, the Financial and Physical Resources Committee, the Catholic Education Office facilities team, and the state and federal governments for their ongoing support of our capital works program.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Bishop Anthony blesses Catherine McAuley Westmead’s hospitality kitchen.

Gregory B Whitty
Executive Director of Schools

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**FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SCHOOLS**

While we know the biggest difference to student learning is the quality of the teaching, there is research to indicate the nature and quality of learning spaces also has an impact on student academic achievement.

In a paper on the effect of physical learning environments on student achievement, the Victorian Institute of Teaching says there is "sufficient research to state with confidence that the building in which students spend a good deal of their time learning, does in fact influence how well they learn" (Fairhurst, G. 2004).

The types of spaces also have an influence, therefore "schools must create spaces that are diverse, similar to the way cities attract people, rather than the spaces being purely functional" (Bunting, A 2004:12).

In the Parramatta Diocese, we are leading the way in school space design to ensure our classrooms are flexible and able to cater to contemporary learning and teaching approaches now, and in the future. Connectivity, collaboration and creativity are the hallmarks of 21st century life and work, and as such, our schools need to be places that support and foster these qualities and skills.

Our response to the Building the Education Revolution (BER) has been praised by our local Members of Parliament and others, as an outstanding and innovative use of the funding. Our approach is a testament to the work our school and parish communities have been doing to ensure we keep learning and teaching at the heart of school building design and renovation.

While the BER is now completed, we continue our commitment with your support through the Diocesan School Building Levy, to the ongoing investment of world-class educational infrastructure to support quality learning and teaching for our students and staff.

I would like to acknowledge the role of our planning reference groups involved in the development of projects, the Parramatta Diocesan Catholic Schools Council, the Department of Education and Communities, facilities officers of the Catholic Education Office, and the state and federal governments for their ongoing support of our capital works program.

Yours sincerely,

Gregory B Whitty
Executive Director of Schools

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**BUILDING THE LEVY BUILDING**

Since the commencement of the Diocesan School Building Levy in 1997, parishes have been relieved of any financial responsibility for systematic Catholic schools in the Diocese. The cost of providing new facilities and upgrading school buildings is shared by families with children attending our schools, the Parramatta Diocesan school system budget, and funding from state and federal governments.

The building levy is charged per family and is collected at the school attended by the child. The levy is calculated from 1 January 1997, and one-off cash contributions and annual loan payments (credit servicing) associated with all new building projects approved by the Parramatta Diocesan Catholic Schools Council (PDCSC). If due to financial hardship, a family is unable to pay the building levy, arrangements can be made to have the levy reduced or waived. The school building levy is a successful initiative which has enabled necessary school facilities to be established in the Diocese for so many years. It would otherwise have been the case.

As a consequence, staff and students are accommodated in learning environments consistent with the high standard of education that parents have come to expect of Catholic schools in the Diocese. Substantial levels of capital investment will be required well into the future to meet the needs of our fast growing Diocese. Furthermore, to maintain standards at their present level, and to make improvements where necessary, funds for capital replacement will also be required. The use of the levy for these purposes is so important today as it was when the fund was established. In determining the projects that will be undertaken each year, the PDCSC receives advice from its Financial and Physical Resources Committee based on submissions received from schools. Priority is based on educational needs and standards relating to the area, the functionality and relationship of spaces, and the quality of accommodation.