Pathways for Middle Schooling:
Walking the Talk

A POSITION PAPER AND SELF-AUDIT PROCESS

Catholic Education
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PREAMBLE

This paper responds to the call for a statewide focus on reforms in the middle years of schooling. We are developing the auditing capacity for all curriculum areas and phases of schooling throughout the period of the current Brisbane Catholic Education Strategic Renewal Framework (2002-2006) cycle. A process for a rigorous audit of school practices will be developed. This is a position paper on middle schooling and all schools are encouraged to audit their current practices for this phase of schooling.

The **purpose** of this paper is therefore to:

PURPOSE

- Promote further dialogue about reforms in the middle years of schooling that generate quality learning outcomes for learners

- Describe appropriate and effective practices for the middle years of schooling

- Assist school communities to audit their current practices (see Appendix 1)

- Inform the development of a school action plan that assists schools to meet the needs of young adolescents. (See Appendices 2 & 3)

SRF

Brisbane Catholic Education has had a commitment to enriching opportunities for students in the middle years of schooling since 1997. Our *Strategic Renewal Framework* focuses upon the provision of high quality teaching and learning outcomes for students. We continue to commit ourselves to reform in the middle years, particularly through these priorities:

- *Enhance and resource a curriculum in which teaching and learning in our schools establishes improved student learning outcomes (1)*

- *Enhance the effectiveness of the classroom teaching of religion and the faith development of staff and students (2)*

- *Further develop the pastoral care and support provided to students and their families (3)*

- *Enhance the professional support and pastoral care of staff (4)*

- *Strengthen relationships within and beyond our school communities (5)*

- *Integrate information and communication technologies into student and staff learning processes (7).*

ETRF

The recent **Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF)** in Queensland commenced action in the early and senior phases of schooling and in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for learning. The ETRF White Paper also highlighted

the need for similar action in the middle years of schooling. The Report to the Minister: The Middle Phase of Learning included clear messages about:

- Curriculum and policy issues associated with adopting a middle schooling philosophy

- Innovative ways to improve student achievement in the middle years, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy

- Strategies to ensure continuous support to students through different phases of schooling, through encouraging stronger links between primary and secondary schools

- Specific strategies for students at risk of leaving school early.

The Catholic Church has affirmed that:

"During childhood and adolescence a student needs to experience personal relations with outstanding educators, and what is taught has greater influence on the student's formation when placed in a context of personal involvement, genuine reciprocity, coherence of attitudes, lifestyles and day to day behaviour. While respecting individual roles, the community dimension should be fostered, since it is one of the most enriching developments for the contemporary school."
'The Catholic School on the Threshold of the New Millennium', N 18

STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING

This document highlights students as the centre of the learning process. Similarly, literature on middle schooling promotes the vital nature of: positive personal relationships between educators and students; students as active participants in the learning process; community of and beyond the school as enriching experiences for student development. These elements can assist the formation of Christian values in young adolescents.

PASTORAL CARE

Pastoral care is a distinguishing feature in Catholic schools. We have a holistic view of education that encompasses more than the academic development of students. Students' spiritual, physical, emotional, and social development are of equal importance. Teachers are aware of the wide variation within any one group of adolescents in their development. Catholic schools ought to sustain the engagement of young people in their learning. It is essential that experiences and opportunities be provided that enable young people to gain a sense of identity, purpose, success and wellbeing within the context of a Catholic community.
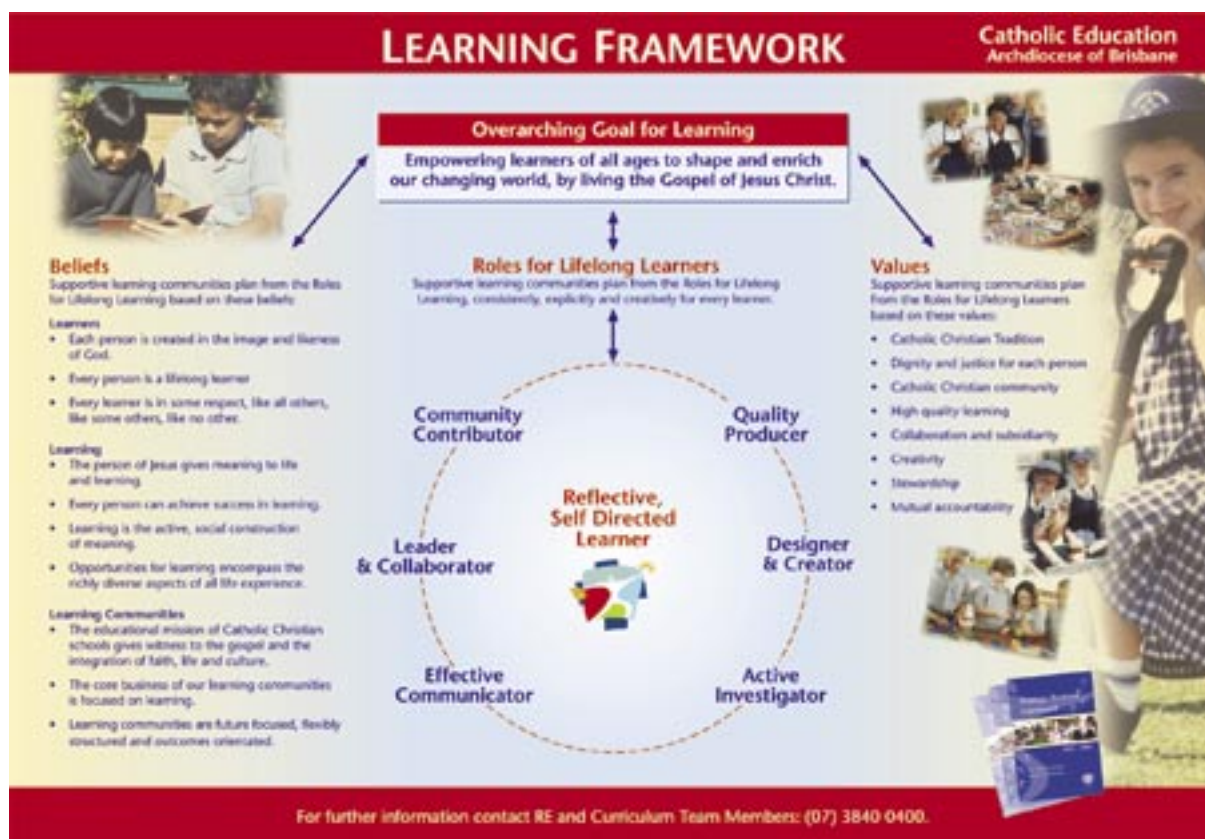
LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Added to this, Brisbane Catholic Education's **Learning Framework** sets out for schools *Roles for Lifelong Learners*. These roles provide a means for the development of skills and capacities for further learning and the creation of teaching and learning environments that are centred upon student learning, which are a focus in middle schooling reforms. The values, beliefs and overarching goal of the *Learning Framework* all contribute to the active engagement of students proactively in their learning.

We recognise that some schools have already made significant steps towards improving the engagement and achievement of young

adolescent learners. As our schools strive towards the provision of high quality inclusive Catholic schooling, middle schooling initiatives should continue to be addressed.

The BCE Strategic Renewal Cycle identifies criteria for schools as they review and reflect, plan and take action in improving the educational process. Schools in their school renewal processes include reflection upon reform in the middle years of schooling.

Learning Framework - developing competence and capacity

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What opportunities do we provide for middle years students to develop as lifelong learners?

- What data does our school collect about engagement and achievement of young adolescent learners?

- How do we analyse and use this data to plan for improving the educational process for adolescent learners?

- How aware are our teachers of recent literature on the nature of adolescence to enhance their professional relationships with students?

Defining the middle years of schooling

Students in the middle years of schooling share an array of rapidly changing, diverse and often challenging qualities. Other than infancy, research identifies the ages of approximately 10 to 14 years as a time when children develop and grow more rapidly than during any other developmental stage. The major difference between these stages of rapid growth and development is that the young adolescent is more highly conscious of the changes that they are experiencing. This can result in an acute self-awareness of these processes. These change processes have direct implications for student learning in the middle years of schooling. (Turning Points 8:2003)

The middle years of schooling are a time when young people make choices that impact significantly on the rest of their lives. These choices are made by adolescents in a rapidly changing world, where, for example:

- they have access to extensive and sophisticated informational sources outside of the school and family

- they are the target of mass media and advertising

- they are participants in a society that has a growing consumer culture

- they will participate in a world where the certainty of learning one set of job-related skills for a lifetime of employment will not be sufficient.

Middle schooling refers to the practices that make formal education responsive and appropriate to the needs of young adolescents. Most commonly, middle schooling reforms are based on a constructivist approach to curriculum and pedagogy in a supportive school environment that is organised to cater for the needs of young adolescents. Additionally, organisation of the school is structured to allow for teaming of groups of teachers and students and flexibility in the use of time, space and resources. School organisation should contribute to the formation of positive relationships between teachers and students.

Recent research shows that effective middle schooling programs do not result specifically from structural change. Rather, they come about when a school ethos focuses on success for each student. In line with this and other findings, the focus for the middle years of schooling is on student engagement and achievement rather than physical structures or setting up separate middle schools. Effective middle schooling can occur in the full range of school settings:

- P–7 schools

- 8–12 schools

- P–10 schools

- P–12 schools.

There is a wide body of literature currently available about middle schooling reforms. Further information about middle schooling practices and initiatives both nationally and internationally can be found by exploring the links provided in the BCEC Intranet and Internet: Curriculum section.

MIDDLE YEARS

MIDDLE YEARS

Conclusion

Pathways for Middle Schooling: Walking the Talk, a position paper on middle schooling reform for BCE schools, builds upon the strong foundation of work already undertaken in this area since 1997. It provides tools for schools to reflect upon current practice and provides the following key messages:

- Middle schooling reforms relate to the engagement of young adolescents proactively in their learning through appropriate curriculum, pedagogy and school organisation rather than mere structural reforms.

- Middle schooling reform is not about restructuring schools to isolate the middle years of schooling.

- Pastoral care is of key importance in ensuring that young adolescents receive the support they require as they pass through this significant stage of development.

From this position paper and in conjunction with school renewal processes, it is recommended that:

1. All schools audit their current practices in the middle years of schooling and show evidence of this in school renewal planning documents.

2. School leaders take responsibility to support staff in keeping up to date with contemporary theories and understandings about adolescent development.

3. Schools focus on appropriate pedagogy and curriculum to engage adolescent learners.

4. Schools structure learning environments to best meet the needs of young adolescents.

5. Schools continue to strive to build positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students to enhance their learning outcomes.

School leaders and teachers could use the tools included in the appendices of this paper to identify their specific needs and challenges, and to consider a process of renewal and change at both the whole school and classroom levels.

APPENDIX 1
Characteristics of effective middle schooling practice school audit tool

Below is a synthesis of effective middle schooling practices from the literature and school projects conducted throughout Australia and internationally. The practices listed have been grouped under the values underpinning middle schooling (Barratt, 1998:31). School leaders and teachers are encouraged to use this list of practices to audit their own practice in implementing middle schooling reforms. Identified practices that may not be currently employed then become priorities for a school action plan (see sample Action Plans in Appendices 2 & 3), which forms part of whole school renewal planning.

The rating scale indicates:

1 – Requires investigation in our school

2 – No evidence of this practice currently in our school

3 – Minor evidence of this practice currently in our school

4 – This practice is being implemented in our school

5 – This practice is well developed in our school

You are encouraged to highlight on the scale below the rating that 'best fits' your school's current situation. Use the indicators column provided to list evidence of activities that support the implementation of each middle schooling practice.

LEARNER-CENTRED

Practices:	Rating:					Indicators:
A flexible approach to curriculum is created that allows teachers to provide learning experiences that connect with and are relevant to young adolescent students' personal and social issues and their out of school experiences	1	2	3	4	5	
Teachers provide learning experiences that acknowledge young adolescent students' prior knowledge and experience, allowing them to gain skills and knowledge needed for their next stage of development	1	2	3	4	5	
Teaching and learning strategies that promote active learning processes are provided to explicitly develop reading, writing, critical thinking, decision-making and creativity	1	2	3	4	5	
Teachers assist young adolescent students to set personal standards and/or goals, to evaluate their own accomplishments and to assess their progress in both knowledge and behavioural outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	
Young adolescent students are provided with the opportunity to reflect on their learning experiences and how they learn best	1	2	3	4	5	

COLLABORATIVELY ORGANISED

Practices:	Rating:					Indicators:
Teachers work as transdisciplinary teams, sharing information about students in their care and planning a coordinated and integrated curriculum where appropriate	1	2	3	4	5	
Age-appropriate opportunities are provided for students to link their learning with the community, including local business and industry, to prepare young adolescents for their life in the community and world of work	1	2	3	4	5	
Teams of teachers know and understand their students well and employ powerful pedagogical strategies to challenge and extend students within a supportive environment	1	2	3	4	5	
Data is used collaboratively to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the teams' teaching and learning practices	1	2	3	4	5	
Additional support is identified and offered to those young adolescent students who require it, through individual and small group support	1	2	3	4	5	
School leaders develop and support curriculum practices appropriate for the middle years of schooling	1	2	3	4	5	

OUTCOME-BASED

Practices:	Rating:					Indicators:
The middle years curriculum makes explicit what all young adolescent students need to know and be able to do including essential understandings, skills and competencies	1	2	3	4	5	
Outcomes are used as the means for aligning curriculum and assessment, specifically relating assessment tasks to learning outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	
Teachers use data about young adolescent students' learning progress to inform future teaching and learning						
Teachers develop models of authentic assessment and reporting that involve teacher, student and community judgement	1	2	3	4	5	
Criteria for assessment is negotiated or made explicit to young adolescent students at the commencement of a phase of learning	1	2	3	4	5	
Teachers use a range of appropriate pedagogical approaches to assist students to achieve learning outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	

FLEXIBLY CONSTRUCTED

Practices:	Rating:					Indicators:
The school is structured and organised to maximise the time available for teaching and learning	1	2	3	4	5	
Structures are responsive to local needs and circumstances and reflect creative uses of time, space and existing resources	1	2	3	4	5	
Sustained periods of time are planned for to ensure that young adolescent students develop quality relationships with a small number of adults	1	2	3	4	5	
Young adolescent students are grouped in flexible ways to integrate whole class, small group and individual learning	1	2	3	4	5	

ETHICALLY AWARE

Practices:	Rating:					Indicators:
Innovation initiated by school leadership in middle schooling practices is focused on identified goals, culture building and learning for all	1	2	3	4	5	
Educational approaches to assessment and reporting used by teachers are just and equitable	1	2	3	4	5	
Students grow in their understanding of the Church's Social Justice Teachings through their learning experiences	1	2	3	4	5	
Students are actively engaged in the development and negotiation of behaviour management policies and practices	1	2	3	4	5	
Justice, respect and concern for the needs of others are reflected in the everyday practice of students, teachers and school leaders	1	2	3	4	5	

STRATEGICALLY LINKED

Practices:	Rating:					Indicators:
All areas of the school provide a curriculum that is connected across year levels and phases of schooling	1	2	3	4	5	
Teachers share student learning achievement data within and across phases of schooling to ensure continuity of learning	1	2	3	4	5	
School policies for teaching and learning exist, are known by students, staff and parents and are reviewed regularly	1	2	3	4	5	
A strategic professional development plan exists for staff who teach in the middle years and is regularly evaluated for effectiveness						

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED

Practices:	Rating:					Indicators:
Opportunities are provided for the wider community to be used as a resource in learning, providing materials and personnel for in-class activities as well as providing on-site opportunities for learning	1	2	3	4	5	
Students are provided with age-appropriate engagement in social service and community outreach programs/experiences	1	2	3	4	5	
School leadership communicates a strong expectation for the appropriate behaviour of young adolescents in the school and community	1	2	3	4	5	
Parents and representatives from community organisations and institutions beyond the school are involved in productive partnerships that enhance learning programs in the middle years	1	2	3	4	5	

ADEQUATELY RESOURCED

Practices:	Rating:					Indicators:
Technology platforms are developed to enable teachers, students and community members to engage in cooperative learning projects that have multiple benefits	1	2	3	4	5	
Learning resources (eg multi-media materials) that reflect an holistic view of knowledge and its application in real-life settings are sought and made available	1	2	3	4	5	
Professional resources for teachers for developing integrated negotiated curriculum are easily accessible	1	2	3	4	5	
Groupings of students (eg Year Level, Pastoral Care, Home Rooms) are well organised and resourced appropriately	1	2	3	4	5	
People and resources are accessed and allocated in order to support effective teaching and learning in the middle years	1	2	3	4	5	

APPENDIX 2
Middle schooling reform – sample action plan 1 (Secondary School)

Action	Completed by:	Participants	Resources
LEARNER-CENTRED • Survey students about their personal and social concerns • Audit current curriculum – are learning tasks connected and relevant to adolescent students' personal and social issues and their out of school experience?	End of Semester 2 2004	Year 8 teachers BCE Education Officers	1 x Teacher Replacement Day for 1 teacher to develop a survey and analyse results from students Teaching and learning programs 1 x Teacher Replacement Day per teacher to audit their curriculum programs
COLLABORATIVELY ORGANISED • Explore methods of creating transdisciplinary teams for middle years students – visit schools advanced in their implementation of middle schooling practices. • Organise groupings of mixed ability students who will work with key personnel in teaching and learning processes in the coming year	End of Semester 2 2004	School leadership team Year 8 teachers BCE Education Officers	Teacher Replacement Days for staff to visit other schools Sessions to discuss options on Pupil Free Day, Terms 2 & 3
OUTCOME-BASED • Use the BCE Learning Framework, Queensland syllabus documents and support materials to plan learning tasks for young adolescents	End of Semester 2 2005	Year 8 teachers BCE Education Officers	BCE Learning Framework Queensland KLA Syllabuses and support materials Other curriculum planning resources Pupil Free Day Session, Term 1 1 x Teacher Replacement Day per teacher, per term for planning
FLEXIBLY CONSTRUCTED • Explore pedagogies and methods of organising teaching and learning activities (i.e. inquiry approaches) that allow for student prior learning to be acknowledged and built upon	End of Semester 2 2005	Year 8 teachers BCE Education Officers	Staff meeting workshops to explore 'Productive Pedagogies' and inquiry models
ETHICALLY AWARE • A focus on middle schooling practices is evident in whole-school renewal processes, where teachers have been surveyed to identify individual professional development needs	End of Semester 2 2004	Years 8 & 9 teachers School leadership team	Meeting time for school leadership team Planning session for staff involved in teaching in the middle years
COMMUNITY ORIENTED • Explore the opportunities available for the community to be used as a resource in learning	Term 3 2004	Year 8 teachers Parents and community members	Letter to parents and local community businesses Teacher Replacement Days for teachers to travel to other schools where this is currently working well
ADEQUATELY RESOURCED • Audit the use of information and communication technologies in student learning across learning areas – is there a balance?	End of Semester 2 2004	Member of school leadership team Year 8 teachers	Timetables Teacher programs Staff meetings x2
STRATEGICALLY LINKED • Make connections with previous teachers of middle years students to ensure smooth transitions in learning from one phase of schooling to the next	End of Semester 2 2004	Year 8 teachers BCE Education Officers Previous teachers of students in the middle years	Meeting time for teachers to share information about students' academic and social skills; both within schools and across schools (i.e. primary and secondary schools) Samples of student work to assemble a portfolio of student achievement

APPENDIX 3
Middle schooling reform – sample action plan 2 (Primary School)

Action	Completed by:	Participants	Resources
LEARNER-CENTRED • Audit current curriculum – negotiate with students topics that are of interest to them personally and socially to identify appropriate concepts for curriculum planning	Week 2 Term 1 2005	Years 6 & 7 teachers BCE Education Officers	PD session to familiarise teachers with the Beane/ Broadhagen model of curriculum negotiation 1 school day allocated for students to engage in the negotiation process
COLLABORATIVELY ORGANISED • Explore methods of creating transdisciplinary teams for middle years students – visit schools advanced in their implementation of middle schooling practices. • Organise groupings of mixed ability students across Years 6 & 7 who will work with key personnel in teaching and learning processes	End of Term 3 (for implementation in 2005)	School leadership team Years 6 & 7 teachers BCE Education Officers	Teacher Replacement Days for staff to visit other schools Sessions to discuss options on Pupil Free Day, Terms 2 & 3
OUTCOME-BASED • Use the BCE Learning Framework, Queensland syllabus documents and support materials to plan learning tasks for young adolescents	Ongoing throughout 2004/ 2005	Years 6 & 7 teachers BCE Education Officers	BCE Learning Framework Queensland KLA Syllabuses Other curriculum planning resources Pupil Free Day Session, Term 1 1 x Teacher Replacement Day per term, per teacher for planning
FLEXIBLY CONSTRUCTED • Explore pedagogies and methods of organising teaching and learning activities (i.e. inquiry approaches) that allow for student prior learning to be acknowledged and built upon	Ongoing throughout 2004/ 2005	Years 6 & 7 teachers BCE Education Officers	Staff meeting workshops to explore 'Productive Pedagogies' and inquiry models Planning time with BCE personnel
ETHICALLY AWARE • A focus on middle schooling practices is evident in whole-school renewal processes, where teachers have been surveyed to identify individual professional development needs	End of Semester 2 2004	School leadership team Years 6 & 7 teachers	Meeting time for school leadership team Planning session for staff involved in teaching in the middle years to prioritise actions for middle years reform based on staff needs
COMMUNITY ORIENTED • Explore the opportunities available for the community to be used as a resource in learning	Term 4 2004	Years 6 & 7 teachers Parents and community members	Letter to parents and local community businesses Time for teachers to travel to other schools where this is currently working well 2 x Staff meeting sessions to brainstorm ideas to promote community involvement
ADEQUATELY RESOURCED • Audit the use of information and communication technologies in student learning across the curriculum – are these processes well integrated?	End of Semester 2 2004	Member of school leadership team Years 6 & 7 teachers	Teacher programs Staff meetings X 2
STRATEGICALLY LINKED • Make connections with future teachers of middle years students to ensure smooth transitions in learning from primary to secondary school • Assist students to create portfolios of their learning achievement to take with them to secondary school	End of Semester 2 2004	Years 6 & 7 teachers BCE Education Officers Future teachers of students in secondary schools	Meeting time for teachers to share information about students academic and social skills; both within schools and across schools (i.e. primary and secondary schools) Samples of student work to assemble a portfolio of student achievement

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