CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

EARLY YEARS’ POSITIONAL STATEMENT

Each child is a precious and sacred gift from God created as an individual with their own unique talents and abilities. Catholic schools and care settings cherish each child as a special miracle and create an environment which enables them to experience the joy and wonder of our world. The time from conception through to eight years of age is a vital time for the development and learning of children. The early years are when brain development is most active. At this time, all children’s experiences - physical, cognitive, linguistic, religious, spiritual, creative, social and emotional – are critical, as they impact on later outcomes in life.

By developing strong attachments to those caring for them, including parents, extended family and educators, all children, develop a sense of being and belonging. Educators work closely with primary caregivers to ensure that strong attachments are formed. Learning and development in the earliest of these years occurs through routine care giving, individual rituals, play and sensory experiences that are developmentally appropriate.

Children in the early years learn most effectively through play-based experiences. Play is a vehicle for learning which involves a range of opportunities to explore, imagine, investigate and engage in purposeful and meaningful experiences. It is through play-based experiences that children make sense of their world, as they engage with others and their environment. These learning opportunities are child initiated, with peer interaction and negotiated by the child with educators and adults.

The Catholic education system provides a genuine education and care choice for families. Catholic schools and care settings provide inclusive and dynamic programs for early years. These quality programs are based on an understanding of current brain development and early years’ research. The focus is holistic learning based on child development and early years’ pedagogy. In implementing these programs, educators recognise that children are learning from conception and develop in their own time and at their own pace. They understand that all children are strong, competent and unique. Children are creative and independent thinkers, great problem solvers and communicators who learn and grow through play.

Central to quality early years’ programs are relationships and partnerships. Educators recognise that families are children’s first and most influential educators. They create a welcoming environment where all children and families are respected and actively encouraged to collaborate. Partnerships are based on foundations of understanding each others’ expectations and attitudes and they build on the strengths of each others’ knowledge.

The rich and diverse communities of which the children are a part are valued and understood as central to their lives and their learning. Educators respect the history, culture, language and traditions of families and communities and see learning in a social context built on collaboration and community participation.

Educators take on many roles in play with children, move flexibly in and out of these different roles and draw on different strategies as the context changes. Educators are deliberate, purposeful, and reflective in their planning, documenting and evaluating of children’s learning. They provide quality environments that engage children actively in their learning and ensure the children’s wellbeing, health and safety. Children’s religious, spiritual, social and emotional growth is nurtured by experiencing God’s love for them as they form respectful and reciprocal relationships. Young children are encouraged to develop a positive image of themselves and others as they begin to live the gospel message.

Catholic schools and care settings welcome children into a caring and stimulating environment where educators give witness to Catholic beliefs, values, and attitudes. The educators in these settings provide leadership and are dedicated to their own learning and that of others. They design play-based learning programs that ‘capture the integrated and complex learning and development of all children’ by pursuing the five outcomes in Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Framework for Australia.

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children are effective communicators
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

The Early Learning Years Framework is implemented in Catholic schools and care settings in conjunction with the Western Australian Curriculum Framework and within the context of a distinctive Catholic program which aims to develop children as followers of Jesus in today’s world.