



# Diocese of Broken Bay

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## **OPINION PIECE – for The Daily Telegraph 08/08/07**

**By Most Rev David L. Walker DD**

**Bishop for the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay**

Recently, the Catholic Bishops of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory have been reflecting on their Catholic schools. The result of this reflection has been expressed in a new document “Catholic Schools at a Crossroads”, issued in the name of all the bishops of the NSW-ACT regions.

This is a pastoral document meant to express in a positive way what our Catholic identity is, why we conduct our schools, and what we expect of those who are involved in Catholic education.

Recognizing the changing nature of the composition of students in our schools, the bishops asked: should we make the schools just for Catholics, or; should we embrace, as a sign of the times, the broader composition of students that make up our schools? They chose the latter. This document is not an attempt to exclude non catholic students from our schools.

The main focus of the document is how the bishops can promote the Catholic identity of our schools. This can be done by ensuring that, at enrolment, applicants have a clear understanding of what the Catholic school is and what it sets out to achieve. This is clearly stated in the document. It can also be done by ensuring that the majority of our teachers are committed to, and living, the Catholic faith, and want to share it with the children. This is not meant to exclude non-Catholic teachers. There are many non-Catholic teachers in our schools who are committed to the ideals of Catholic education.

The bishops acknowledge that half of Catholic children attend the government schools, and in particular, most of the children of poorer Catholic families are in the state schools. The bishops would like to reverse that trend, and some dioceses have projects intended to do just that.

This is not a negative document. It is a document that looks to the future in the light of the present. It is not an edict, a body of rules set in concrete. It is a vision of what the Catholic School can, and should, be. The bishops believe that this vision will make our Catholic schools more appealing to our own people and to others as well. The bishops express gratitude to religious and staff of the past who laid the basis for our Catholic schools. They renew their commitment to Catholic Schools as an important part of the mission of the Church.