The secondary schools projects have gained significant momentum since the initial update in Term 1. The projects, as a whole, form a phase of implementation that provides one of the most significant periods of growth and development transforming the secondary landscape. By 2020, there will be 13 secondary schools, 10 of which will have Stage 6 teaching and 8 of the 13 schools will be 7 to 12 campuses. It is also anticipated that a fourteenth secondary school will be established providing education for some of the most at-risk and marginalised students in our community.

2018 is looming fast, and this will be a hallmark year with the first Year 7 students entering St Bede’s, the initial entry of seniors into Gateshead, the re-introduction of seniors at Lochinvar and the commencement of the diocese’s first Flexible Learning Centre.

The purpose of the update is to ensure the diocesan community is well aware of the emerging educational changes.

Catholic Practice and Faith Formation

This area in secondary schooling focused on the implementation of recommendations regarding the teaching of Religion, the presence of Eucharist in schools and a consideration of the faith formation experiences of secondary students. There is an ongoing move to develop accredited specialist teachers of Religion and Studies of Religion, and teachers who will include a significant proportion of Religion in their teaching program. The momentum in this evolution, coming from a stage when a significant proportion of staff would teach their key curriculum area and also a Religion class, to a phase we are now developing where a smaller team of teachers is treating Religion as the major pedagogical focus. This process is ongoing.

It is evident significant work has been accomplished with regard to a more regular Eucharistic presence across secondary schools, emerging from an active desire to make this a greater reality for staff and students, as well as being the result of steps to build stronger school-parish links. Finally, a body of data has been collected from secondary schools on current formation practices. The next phase is to examine the implications of this data and pursue recommendations that ensure the practices across the stages are effectively sequenced and aligned, and schools are optimally supported in the ongoing evolution of student formation practices.

Provision of a New, Coeducational Secondary School, Years 7–12, at Chisholm

Since the last update, the secondary school at Chisholm has begun to shape its identity. The school name was officially announced in early May, St Bede’s Catholic College, Chisholm and is named after a great role model for students, a seventh century Doctor of the Church, who was a renowned historian, scientist, poet and a prolific author.

The Foundation Principal, Mr John Murphy, has been appointed, and he, along with his Executive Assistant, will be in place for 2017, in preparation for 2018. The school will commence with a Year 7 cohort. Under chair Mr Craig Wattam, the Implementation Committee has been working with the architects from Schreiber Hamilton and the school design is well developed. An application for funding has been submitted with the NSW Capital Block Grant Authority. The foundation stone for the building has been unveiled and it is anticipated the first symbolic turning of the soil by Bishop Bill will occur by year’s end, paving the way for site preparation and commencement of building.
Provision of a New, Co-educational Secondary School, Years 7–12, at Medowie

2020 will see the inaugural intake into this new 7 to 12 school. Similar to St Bede’s, a Foundation Principal will be appointed in June, 2018, to commence in 2019. The initial work of the Implementation Committee has focused on an Education Brief which will inform school design, having in place a process for the appointment of an architect, which will occur by the end of October this year, and to engage with the parish and parent community for the all important naming of the school. The community consultation has occurred and recommendations are with Bishop Bill for final approval. An announcement for the new school is anticipated by the end of August.

It has been exciting and interesting to be a representative of the priests, parish co-ordinator and the people in the three parishes to be served by the above school. The planning group has had two meetings to date and been considering how to provide a Catholic High School that will cater for our teenagers in the 21st century. It is pleasing to note that a Chapel on the site is being planned. It is expected the chapel will cater for a number of classes and the nearby community.

Parish Priest – Fr Kevin Kern

It has been a privilege to be involved in the initial conversations around development of the much-needed new high school in Medowie. The opportunity to be the voice and representative for both the students and families from the Tomaree Peninsula has been an honour. Having the ability to have our concerns, thoughts and ideas heard and included is invaluable to our community.

Rachael Connor, Parent

Equitable Access to Curriculum Delivery

A further challenge for future secondary schooling is to have provision of curriculum delivery for students by modes other than the traditional classroom setting. An implementation committee has been established and includes Mr Andrew Cornwall (Education Officer, CSO), Mr Greg Ptolemy (Assistant Principal, St Paul’s, Booragul), Mr Craig Wattam (Assistant Director, CSO), Mr Andrew Burgess, (facilitator of on-line learning, Diocese of Lismore) and myself. The task of this committee is to develop courses of study that may be undertaken in an online or multi-modal capacity, ensuring students from across the diocese have greater access to a wider range of study options. It is anticipated that a range of options will be available for Course Information Handbooks, Term 2, 2017.

Strengthened Relationship Between All Saints College, St Peter’s Campus and St Mary’s Campus

Prominent in the study undertaken was the substantial demographic growth of school-aged children in the Maitland region. This has seen the expansion of St Joseph’s, Lochinvar and the establishment of St Bede’s, Chisholm. This has created the challenging opportunity for the two campuses of All Saints, St Peter’s and St Mary’s, to re-vision the college’s future. Significant work has been accomplished by staff and parent bodies of the two campuses, facilitated by a combined staff and parent working party looking at how the journey of students, as well as parents and staff, across Years 7 to 12 could be optimised and how the two campuses may be further aligned. The two staffs will join for a professional development day on the first day of Term 3 at the Mercure Resort, Hunter Valley, to more deeply explore their ongoing relationship.

St Mary’s Campus, Maitland: “Meeting twice per school term, the All Saints College Working Party has collected preliminary ideas from each stakeholder group – staff, parents and executive of the St Peter’s and St Mary’s campuses to explore what is possible in bringing us together under the All Saints banner.

Geraldine Blake, Teacher

The ASC Working Party has made good progress to date with both St Peter’s and St Mary’s putting forward their ideas on how we can strengthen the relationship between the two campuses. St Peter’s staff is looking forward to the professional development day with St Mary’s on 18 July that will focus on the Vision and Mission of the college and what the future may hold.

Kathryn Johnstone, Teacher, St Peter’s Campus, Maitland

Investigate Alternate School Settings

One of the more challenging recommendations of the study into the provision of secondary schooling was the consideration of a secondary school for highly vulnerable or marginalised students. This journey has involved significant exploration with Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) which currently runs 19 Flexis around Australia, accommodating around 2,000 students. They range in size from around 40 in Hobart to 450 in North Melbourne, with most accommodating about 80-90 students.

A Flexi is a registered secondary school and is specifically geared to accommodate marginalised students who, for a whole range of reasons, are not attending a school or may be attending under duress. A Flexi provides a critical solution for such students and, in many ways, answers Catholic education’s fundamental call to assist those most in need. The exploration has examined the establishment and operations and the physical needs of a Flexi. As well as learning spaces, for example, every Flexi has a kitchen and dining area that provides a key community space for staff and students. Breakfast is provided every morning, and all staff and students gather for a prepared lunch every day. It is anticipated a site will be acquired by the year’s end and registration with BOSTES will occur by February for a 2018 commencement.
Extension of St Mary’s, Gateshead and St Joseph’s, Lochinvar to Include Years 11 and 12

The last term has seen a significant boost in planning as the two schools prepare for the successful transition to Stage 6. This journey sees the leaders and staff embrace change processes that will ensure the seniors of these two schools will be engaged in quality teaching and excellent senior environments from day one. Each school has a Project Implementation Committee, comprising staff, parents and system leaders. Key areas of focus have centred around school names and visual identity attending to such areas as crest, school colours and new uniform designs. The most prominent development has been around staff professional learning which has seen the development of a sequenced program of development with Curriculum Co-ordinators and teachers.

Dr John DeCourcy is acting as a mentor to both schools, which is proving to be a great source of support. Each of the Curriculum Co-ordinators at both schools now has a network colleague, an experienced Co-ordinator of Stage 6 courses, whom they will work with each term to ensure they are upskilled in the array of accountabilities and practices; this networking is proving a valuable relationship for all involved. Significant work is being undertaken in curriculum, timetable structures and policy and practice in terms of student wellbeing. Both schools are in the process of appointing Student Co-ordinators who will especially work with Year 10 students and with staff through 2017, effectively transitioning the students for senior schooling. Gateshead is also in the process of appointing a second Assistant Principal who will have special responsibility for Learning and Teaching.

These really are exciting times at St Mary’s for our year group, as we look forward to establishing a new and vibrant culture heading into Stage 6.
Sooay Smith, Yr 9 student, St Mary’s, Gateshead

I’m definitely looking forward to seeing how our school will change in and out of the classroom. It’s great to have a voice in what happens and hopefully St Mary’s will be a unique place we can all be really proud of.
Joel Holland, Yr 9 student, St Mary’s, Gateshead

St Joseph’s progressing to Year 11 and 12 is an overwhelming and exciting thought, as the students of today will be making history and connecting with our ancestors. I am honoured to have this opportunity to carry out this legacy. I am most excited to see what is in store for my class as representatives of the future and ensuring that we are capable of reaching our potential. The advancement of moving into the higher level of schooling is daunting, however, this opportunity of continuing to Year 11 and 12 whilst remaining at St Joseph’s allows the students to be comfortable and settled, as we are all familiar with each other, the teachers and the school.
Isabella Crebert, Yr 9 St Joseph’s, Lochinvar student

Strengthened Relationship Between the Newcastle Cluster of Schools

Similar to All Saints, the three schools in the Newcastle secondary cluster are exploring how they may strengthen their relationship. All Saints has had a strong historical, as well as close physical, connection that has provided a springboard for their journey. The initial challenges for the leaders of these three schools is to identify the purpose of such a relationship and areas that may be valuable to explore. The initial priority areas identified include greater subject awareness and information processes for selection of senior courses through Years 9 and 10; examining current transition processes and how these might be enhanced; a gathering of all senior leaders and Co-ordinators for a facilitated discussion on the recent George Cooney paper commissioned by the NSW Catholic Education Commission, exploring students’ senior subject choices and the disengagement with more academically rigorous courses. The leaders will continue to meet and, as is timely, will engage the broader staff.
Related Developments

Marketing of Catholic Education

Hopefully by now you are well aware of the marketing of Catholic Schools that has been occurring across the diocese since early May. You may have seen our two television commercials, heard our radio ads, driven past the billboards, seen the buses and caught the digital advertising. You will also have seen the Vivid posters that have been adorning schools. The campaign was very much about having the Catholic school brand advertised and celebrated throughout our community, hopefully having those who work in Catholic schools proud of our great name, having parents who have chosen Catholic schools confirmed in their choice, having parents who are thinking about schooling options consider the benefits of Catholic schools and generally having the Catholic school name more visible in our broader community. The campaign is a first for the Catholic Schools Office, and a strategy we aim to continue. We hope you are as proud of it as we are.

School Enrolment Boundaries

The changes that have been developed as a result of the study have created some population shifts around the diocese. Adding to this are continuing demographic changes that have been mapped from 2016 to 2036. These trends have prompted the move to reconsider where students attend school. This is a complex and diverse study but is driven by the desire to ensure we don’t develop outcomes that may negatively impact on a school’s reasonable sustainability. If, for example, we take students from Lochinvar out of the St Mary’s, Maitland, senior cohort, or students from Nelson Bay out of the San Clemente cohort, and simply leave enrolment boundaries as they are, we create some serious population imbalances. Hence, the study is considering how we might restructure future enrolment boundaries that allow all schools and the school system to have confidence in planning.