



MEDIA RELEASE

12 July 2018

Giving young Indigenous Australians the foundations for success

Every year, NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia in July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) spokesperson, Selina Walker, says that the key to success for people of all cultures and ethnicities is education, and ensuring Indigenous young Australians have access to quality education that meets their needs is critical to giving them the foundations for success.

“School attendance continues to be a concern for many Indigenous families.

“Research tells us that missing one full day of school every fortnight equates to one year of education lost by Year 9. That’s an extraordinary setback.

“The educational needs of Indigenous young Australians are quite unique to the culture. Unfortunately, there’s a real disconnect between schools and Indigenous families with many schools lacking an appreciation of the cultural and family commitments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

“The school absence rates among our Indigenous student population need to be reduced and the only way to do that is for schools to partner with their communities to build a strong culture of student and family engagement and seek to identify and respond to the factors affecting school attendance. We need to remember that attendance is everyone’s responsibility – families, the student, the school and the community,” Ms Walker said.

The theme of this year’s NAIDOC Week is '*Because of her, we can*' and it celebrates the essential role that women have played - and continue to play - as active and significant role models at the community, local, state and national levels. Ms Walker says that Indigenous history and culture are an important part of Australia’s identity, which is why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education should always be incorporated in the classroom. She also says that in order for young Indigenous children to reach their full potential and become role models for the next generation, they need a quality education behind them.

“There are many ways that schools can work to increase attendance of their Indigenous student population. Schools should critically assess how welcoming they are to Indigenous families, celebrate their culture, provide them with a safe place free from bullying and racism, communicate with families using a variety of methods that are meaningful and helpful for them, consider how Aboriginal perspectives are taught across the curriculum, encourage families to contact the school if they are having problems with getting a uniform or getting their child to school – these are all strategies to help raise attendance. The other critical thing for schools to do is to show concern when a student is absent and analyse attendance data, look for patterns and find out what is going on within the family or community to influence attendance,” Ms Walker said.

About Selina Walker:

Selina Walker is the Chair of CCSP's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parent Committee. She is a Ngunnawal woman from Canberra and foster mother of three children. As the granddaughter of Aunty Agnes, Canberra's most senior Ngunnawal elder, Ms Walker also attends functions to deliver the Welcome to Country. She opens her home to at-risk Indigenous children by providing much-needed respite care. In 2017 for her efforts, she was named Barnardos ACT Mother of the Year. Ms Walker will be participating in the 'NAIDOC in the North' event this Saturday 14 July 2018 in Holt, ACT.

Media contact: CCSP Executive Director, Linda McNeil (0410 512 070)

The Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) is the peak representative body for parents with children in Catholic schools in NSW.