

# ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL



Bundaroo Street  
Bowral NSW 2576  
Tel: (02) 4861 1768  
Fax: (02) 4862 1941  
[info@stabdow.catholic.edu.au](mailto:info@stabdow.catholic.edu.au)

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Dear Parents/Carers

The recent bushfires have had an impact on all of our school communities, with some schools in particular being quite significantly affected. The consequences of events such as these are not just felt at the time they occur, but also often over a longer period of time, emerging months or even years later. Catholic schools have a long history of responding to families in need, in times of natural disasters such as bushfires and floods as well as financial hardship and loss.

Our Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong schools will continue to play a critical role in supporting the recovery of individuals and communities significantly affected. As we prepare for the imminent commencement of the school year we are deeply saddened that some staff and families have lost everything, others have relatives and close friends who have experienced loss, while others have had their sense of safety and security severely diminished.

Children and young people can become anxious after watching and listening to repeated news stories about bushfires, and can come to believe that everywhere is under threat. They may not realise that footage on television and social media is a replay and not another new event unfolding. This can cause children and young people to feel unsafe and distressed, and present as uncharacteristic behaviours.

You may be concerned about your child's reaction or expression of feelings about the bushfire events. It is important to recognise that almost all distress or behavioural change following such an event is normal. There is no such thing as a typical reaction.

If you or your child have been in any way impacted on, or still feels uncomfortable about these events, please contact and advise the school about what we should know about your specific situation, so that we can offer you and your son/daughter support and counselling if required. Staying connected and being positively engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them. It is really beneficial to encourage children and young people to do things that bring them a sense of joy and accomplishment. Be confident in your role as a parent/carer and limit your child's exposure to potentially distressing news, particularly through social media platforms.

With the full backing of the Catholic Education Office, we strongly encourage families who are experiencing financial hardship to contact us so we can respond to this need in a sensitive, pastoral and practical way.

If you have any concerns at all, please contact the school office for a confidential discussion so that we can provide all appropriate support and assistance.

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This is a time of tremendous hardship, grief and distress for many. Please be assured that our system of Catholic schools and communities is here, for the long-term, to journey with families faced with such significant loss.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Petzer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kayleen Petzer  
Acting Principal