

For two days in June, over one hundred and fifty leaders from primary and secondary schools in the Ballarat Diocese joined with staff from the Catholic Education Office to explore and hold discussions on “System Leadership”. According to Ross Kimber (2016), “System Leadership is recognised as a significant force in creating the right conditions at system and school levels for students to achieve the best possible educational outcomes”. The intentions for the two days of gathering were to inquire into possibilities and opportunities for “systemness” that will enable the diocese to more effectively achieve the education Vision: ***As partners in Catholic education and open to God’s presence, we pursue fullness of life for all*** and to identify and test priorities around system improvement for shared action, by both school and CEO leaders



The days were facilitated by Mr Peter Ryan who had led a review of education in the Diocese and members of the System Improvement Framework Team (SIFT) who undertook to run different sessions over the days. At the colloquium, new ways of structuring and delivering support to our schools was at the centre of the various addresses, and responses to these presentations through opportunities for questions and answers, were an important part of the proceedings. Structured conversations enabled those at the colloquium to name our current reality; dream and name future possibilities; identify what may be needed to proceed and prioritise a plan for action.

The themes that underpinned presentation and discussion times were:

- Clarity of Vision and Purpose
- Improvement Focussed Leadership
- Evidence-based Policy and Practice
- Quality Teaching
- Collaborative Networks and Partnerships
- Targeted use of Resources

Participants were reminded that key to the process was to engage in ‘possibility thinking’ so that “we consciously disrupt our current thinking processes” (Dalton, 2013). They needed to go beyond the current situation and help the Ballarat Diocese to create and shape a better future for Catholic Education.

Each day began with prayer led by staff members from schools and office and on the first evening those who were gathered for the colloquium, joined with Fr Justin Driscoll in the celebration of the Eucharist followed by a social gathering.

