

Advancing Equity through Online Learning

Australian Catholic school systems face ongoing challenges delivering quality education in low-candidature subjects and remote areas. With 38% of Catholic schools located in regional or remote communities, limited staffing and enrolments can often contribute to restricted subject access and create inequitable learning opportunities. Online learning has become a vital strategy to extend opportunity, retain students within Catholic education, and ensure every learner—regardless of location—can access a consistent, high-quality Catholic education. However, while many systems have implemented online learning initiatives, these efforts remain fragmented, with no comprehensive national picture of what works, what doesn't, and where opportunities for improvement lie.

Key Findings

- Ten Catholic systems now operate virtual or hybrid programs, serving 1,723 students in Years 5–12.
- Roughly 1.5 % of Year 11–12 students access at least one online or hybrid subject.
- Highest participation occurs in regional secondary schools and smaller metropolitan schools.
- Teacher shortage and student retention are shared drivers across all systems.

Key Online Learning Success Factors

- Strong pastoral support through local, school-based mentors/learning advisors.
- Cross-system collaboration to share low-candidature subjects
- Flexible employment attracting quality teachers
- Emergency capacity to sustain courses during staffing loss

Strategic Opportunities

- Establish a national community of practice, the Online Learning Subgroup, linking online learning educators.
- Coordinate benchmarking and research on outcomes in Catholic contexts.
- Develop a national professional development framework for digital pedagogy and student wellbeing.

National Snapshot

Comparative Snapshot of Catholic Online Learning Offers (2025)

Geography / Program	Delivery Type	Students (2025)	Technology	Distinctives
WA – Virtual School Network (ViSN)	Fully online (1 live lesson during school hours + 4 weekly study sessions)	353	Microsoft Teams	Equity focus; >30 standard, extension and standard course offerings; flexible teacher employment
Brisbane – FisherONE	Fully online (1 live lesson option before or during school + 4 weekly study sessions)	369	Microsoft Teams	Rapid 3 year growth (40 → 369 students); flexible teacher employment; preparing for full-time online school; 2 options for live sessions
Maitland-Newcastle – Virtual Academy	Hybrid (during school live + study sessions + in-person annual event)	250	Microsoft Teams	Gifted-learner focus for Y 5-8; year-long projects; 75% of diocese schools participate
Parramatta – School of Now	Hybrid (after school live + study sessions + in-person term Masterclasses)	235	Canvas / Zoom	91% of diocese secondary schools participate; standard, extension and VET offerings
Lismore – Online Education Centre	Hybrid (1 live lesson after school + weekly study sessions + in-person term workshops)	193	Google / Moodle / Zoom	20-year legacy; virtual school; cross-diocesan MoU in NSW; ending in 2025
Broken Bay – Cross Campus Courses	Hybrid (1 live lesson + weekly study sessions + occasional in-person workshops)	164	Microsoft/Canvas/Zoom	11 courses incl. languages & VET
Canberra & Goulburn – Virtual Learning Collaborative	Fully online (1 live lesson during school hours + weekly study sessions)	77	Microsoft Teams	Enabled first-ever Y11–12 in western NSW schools; launched in 2023; supports both NSW syllabuses and the Australian Curriculum
Bathurst – Diocesan Learning Hub	Hybrid (1 live lesson after school + weekly study sessions + regional in-person workshops)	45	Canvas / Zoom	Extension subjects; Rural equity focus; inter-diocesan links
Toowoomba – Hybrid Learning	Hybrid (1 live lesson after school + weekly study sessions + in-person term workshops)	37	Microsoft Teams	1 centrally funded specialist Maths teacher + school based educators; school flexibility to chose online learning providers
Saints College (EREA) – Blended	Hybrid (live lessons + study sessions + 1:1 teacher time + face-to-face support via youth worker visits)	NA	NA	Victorian-first model for disengaged youth

Access the Full Report

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