# School Amalgamation Proposal

CORPUS CHRISTI MITTAGONG-BOWRAL

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
WOLLONGONG

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# Introduction

**The Bishop of Wollongong, Most Rev Brian Mascord DD, has initiated a formal four-week consultation period running from 6 to 30 November 2026.**

This consultation invites parents and carers of current students, as well as staff and parishioners to reflect on a Corpus Christi Parish proposal to amalgamate its two primary schools—St Michael's in Mittagong and St Thomas Aquinas in Bowral—and establish a single, unified parish school.

Following correspondence from school families, Bishop Mascord revoked his 29 October 2026 decision to approve the amalgamation to ensure genuine dialogue, pastoral listening, and collaborative discernment could occur. This formal consultation provides a structured process to hear the voices, insights, and concerns of those most directly impacted.

The bishop will carefully weigh all submissions, meeting outcomes, and pastoral realities before making a final determination on whether to approve the amalgamation.

# Purpose of this document

In response to community feedback and recent media stories, this document aims to provide a clear overview of the parish proposal, as well as other relevant information, to ensure parents and carers, staff and parishioners have a shared understanding of what is being proposed and why.

The document is not intended to promote or prosecute the proposal. It is simply intended to be a resource to support constructive consultation so that the bishop has the benefit of informed feedback from members of the parish community who would be directly affected by the proposal.

# Understanding the Church context: parishes and schools.

## What is a parish?

While people frequently use the terms “church” and “parish” interchangeably, canon law recognises them as distinct realities:

- The Church (canon 1214): A sacred building, dedicated or blessed for divine worship, where the faithful assemble for prayer and sacraments.
- The Parish (anons 518-519): A defined community of the Christian faithful within a specific geographic territory, entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor to exercise pastoral care for all people living within those boundaries.

## What is a parish school?

A parish school is an integral ministry and expression of the parish, rather than an independent corporate entity. Catholic schools are called to be places of authentic encounter with Jesus Christ, marked by educational excellence, religious formation, and service to the common good.

## What is the role  of the parish priest?

The parish priest holds responsibility for the pastoral, sacramental, and temporal administration of the parish. Under canon law, he is called to pastorally accompany parishioners across every age and stage of life—baptising infants, catechising children and converts, counselling families, visiting the sick, comforting the dying, and faithfully stewarding parish land and assets for the broader common good.

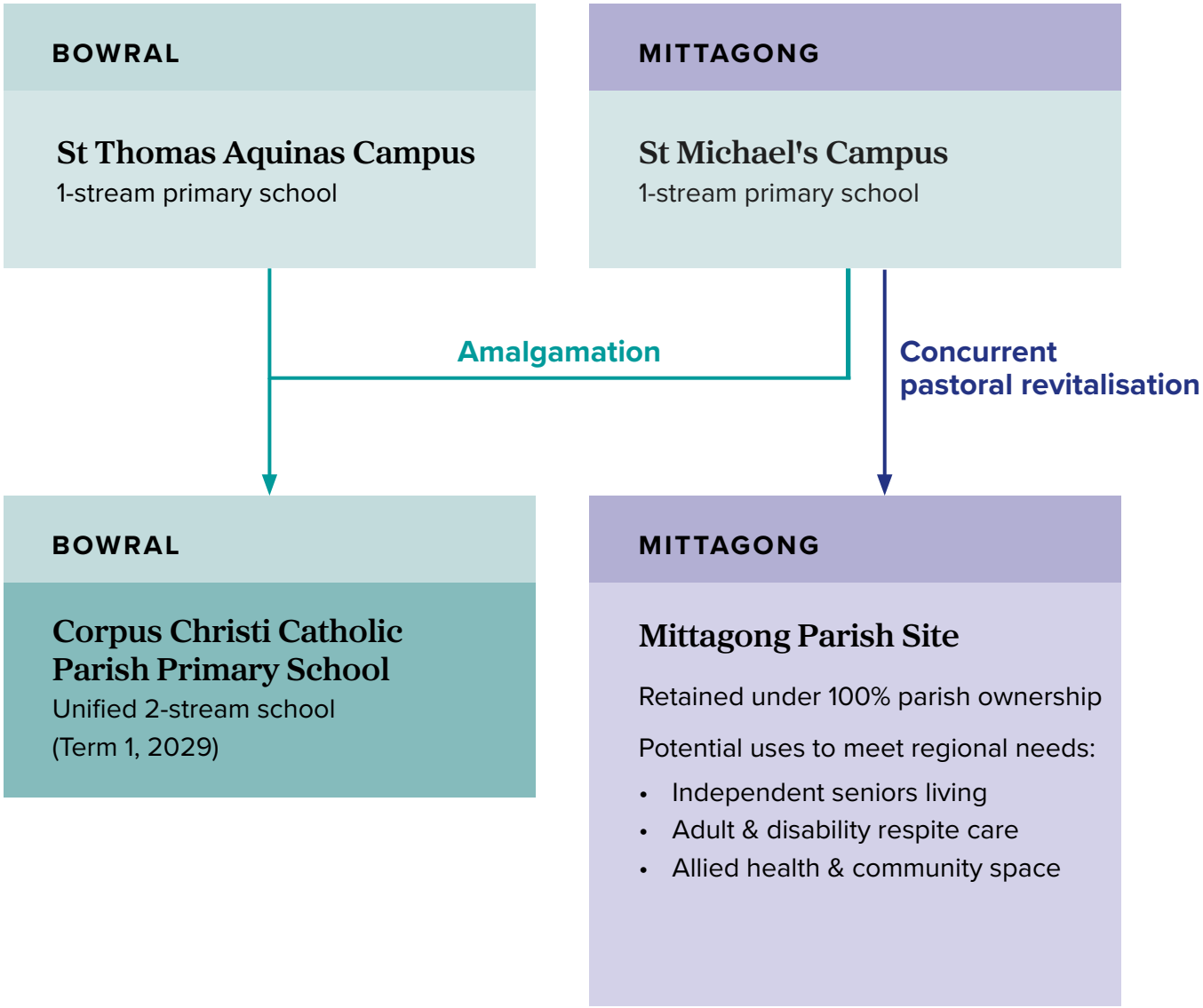
# What is being proposed?

**Corpus Christi Catholic Parish proposes to bring together St Michael's Catholic Parish Primary School (Mittagong) and St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Parish Primary School (Bowral) to form an entirely new, unified school: Corpus Christi Catholic Parish Primary School, Mittagong-Bowral.**

The unified school would be established on the current St Thomas Aquinas campus in Bowral, opening its doors from Term 1, 2029.

By bringing its two school communities together onto the Bowral campus, the parish would be able to continue providing high-quality Catholic education for the same total number of students on one consolidated site. Concurrently, this would enable the St Michael's Mittagong site to be retained under parish ownership and revitalised to address pressing unmet pastoral needs across the Southern Highlands. Potential uses include—but are not limited to—affordable independent seniors living, allied health services, disability and adult respite care, or dedicated community connection facilities.

Importantly, this would be an amalgamation creating an entirely new school community, rather than one existing school absorbing another. It would represent an equal partnership in which families, students, and staff from both St Michael's and St Thomas Aquinas would actively shape a shared identity, culture, and charism together.


BOWRAL
St Thomas Aquinas Campus
1-stream primary school
MITTAGONG
St Michael's Campus
1-stream primary school
Amalgamation
Concurrent pastoral revitalisation
BOWRAL
Corpus Christi Catholic Parish Primary School
Unified 2-stream school
(Term 1, 2029)
MITTAGONG
Mittagong Parish Site
Retained under 100% parish ownership
Potential uses to meet regional needs:
• Independent seniors living
• Adult & disability respite care
• Allied health & community space

# Why is it being proposed?

**At the centre of this proposal is a fundamental question of Christian stewardship: How can Corpus Christi Parish best direct its resources to serve the common good across all stages of life?**

"Never see a need without doing something about it". These words, foundational to the charism of St Mary MacKillop and Fr Julian Tenison Woods, capture the heart of the Gospel. In 2023, Pope Francis held up Mary MacKillop as an exemplar of apostolic charity, noting: "*One essential characteristic of her zeal for the Gospel was her desire to care for the poor and marginalised. This pushed her to go where others refused or were unable to go".*

In the nineteenth century, MacKillop and Tenison Woods answered Christ's call by going directly where the need was greatest, identifying primary education for isolated and poor rural families as an urgent priority. Beyond establishing schools in remote settlements, Mary MacKillop also founded institutions like the House of Providence in Adelaide to shelter the poor and frail elderly.

At her 1995 beatification, Saint Pope John Paul II said Mary MacKillop's *"story reminds us of the need to welcome people, to reach out to the lonely, the bereft, the disadvantaged".* Today, Corpus Christi Parish is called to carry forward that same missionary spirit. While the Gospel call remains constant, the pastoral needs within the parish's boundaries have evolved considerably, with the region home to a large and rapidly growing elderly population.

Operating two separate single-stream primary schools just 5.5 kilometres apart commits both of the parish's significant physical resources to a single ministry: primary education. By re-purposing one of the parish sites, Corpus Christi Parish could make a much more meaningful contribution to meeting the needs of the vulnerable, isolated, and aged across the region, while still providing high-quality Catholic education for families in the parish.

The proposal is not a reflection of any shortcoming at either school. Both St Michael's and St Thomas Aquinas have delivered exemplary Catholic education, pastoral care, and community spirit for generations. Instead, the proposal arises from a pastoral responsibility to steward assets for the common good, ensuring the parish provides excellent Catholic education while actively living out the corporal works of mercy.

# Site selection

A comparative assessment of both sites identified the Bowral campus as the most suitable location for a unified Catholic primary school.

| Comparative factor | St Thomas Aquinas Campus (Bowral) | St Michael's Campus (Mittagong) |
|---|---|---|
| **Site area & expansion** | 1.25 ha (1.36 ha including mixed parish facilities). Sized to comfortably support two streams. | 0.89 ha (including old Presbytery). Highly constrained; bounded by heritage-listed structures that restrict multi-storey development. |
| **Geographic & civic hub** | Bowral is the civic and economic hub of the Southern Highlands, making it a natural transit destination. | Mittagong is the secondary commercial centre. Most students currently commute to St Michael's via bus or car. |
| **Current catchment patterns** | Already functions as a regional school with students from across the parish and as far as Moss Vale. | Draws from Mittagong and northern villages, but records very little enrolment from Bowral or southern townships. |
| **Parish church capacity** | Large parish church on site, capable of gathering the entire combined student body, staff, and parent community together for liturgical worship. | Church capacity cannot seat a unified, multi-stream school cohort under one roof. |

# How families and staff would be supported through the transition

**A two-year transition window (2027–2028) would be established to provide stability, confidence, and care for students, families, and staff.**

## Enrolment guarantees

- Kindergarten enrolments for 2027 at both St Michael's and St Thomas Aquinas would be fully assured.
- Current Year 4 and Year 5 students at St Michael's would be able to complete their entire primary education at the Mittagong campus.
- All current Kindergarten to Year 3 students at St Michael's and all students at St Thomas Aquinas would be guaranteed a place in the new school in 2029.

## Transport planning

In 2027, Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong would conduct targeted consultations with families to evaluate travel patterns and formulate a comprehensive transport plan. This would include consideration of dedicated bus routes and logistics to support travel between Mittagong, surrounding northern villages, and the Bowral campus.

## Traffic management

Comprehensive traffic management reviews would take place during 2027 and 2028 around the Bowral campus to optimise drop-off/pick-up circuits and minimise local congestion. It's important to note St Thomas Aquinas has previously operated as a two-stream school and traffic was able to be managed during this time.

## Uniform flexibility

A thoughtful uniform transition would be implemented in consultation with families. This could include an extended grace period or financial uniform subsidies.

## Student wellbeing and unity

Beginning in 2027, joint curricular, spiritual, and sporting days would allow students, staff, and families to build friendships, meet educators from both schools, become comfortable with the Bowral grounds, and actively help shape the identity, charism and culture of their new school.

## Staff equity and security

Prioritising staff wellbeing and employment security would be central to the transition. Permanent teaching and support staff from both schools would be consulted regarding ongoing career pathways, ensuring fairness, sensitivity, and equity ahead of the 2029 school year.

Additional needs and concerns raised by staff or parents and carers during the transition would also be addressed insofar as possible.

# Pressing needs in the parish

**While the educational mission of Corpus Christi Parish remains strong, the parish's pastoral responsibility calls it to look honestly at the acute, unmet human needs across the Southern Highlands.**

If the proposal was approved, the 0.89-hectare parish site at Mittagong would present a transformative opportunity for the region. Rather than disposing of parish property, the parish's intention would be to retain ownership and revitalise the landholding to address social or community gaps such as those outlined below.

**These examples highlight the kind of needs that could be met if the schools amalgamated, but are not intended to reflect preferred or confirmed options.**

## Affordable seniors living

Wingecarribee Shire Council's Local Housing Strategy *'Housing our Community'* identifies housing affordability and diversity as critical strategic planning challenges, noting an acute shortage of social and affordable housing across the Southern Highlands. The region has become one of the least affordable areas in New South Wales and this high cost environment can leave lower-income residents, young workers, and pensioners severely exposed to housing stress.

The Southern Highlands population is ageing rapidly and the Mittagong site could provide the scale and central, flat village location required to develop affordable independent seniors living. By exploring partnerships with community housing providers the parish could provide dignified, secure shelter without alienating church land.

## Health, respite and care facilities

Despite a rapidly expanding elderly demographic, there is currently no Catholic residential aged care or dedicated seniors respite facility anywhere within Corpus Christi Parish. Family caregivers across the Southern Highlands can also face exhausting and isolated circumstances.

The Mittagong site could potentially be re-purposed to provide facilities such as:

- **Adult day respite:** Dedicated spaces offering compassionate daytime care and social connection for frail seniors, giving primary family carers essential relief.
- **Supported disability accommodation:** Accessible, small-scale living arrangements or day-programs for adults living with disabilities.

- **Catholic residential aged care:** A mission-aligned, small-scale residential facility providing continuous personal and clinical care, enabling older parishioners to remain supported within their parish without having to relocate outside the region.
- **Allied health consulting suites:** Integrated clinic rooms providing affordable, visiting access to physiotherapy, podiatry, occupational therapy, and mental health counselling for residents who struggle to travel to regional hospital hubs.

## Regional community services

Wingecarribee Shire Council's *Community and Recreational Facilities Strategy* identified significant provision gaps in community service space across the Mittagong district, specifically recommending the investigation of a regional community hub in Mittagong.

Existing permanent buildings on the St Michael's campus could be adaptively reused to become a multi-purpose community hub with flexible, accessible halls and meeting rooms to combat social isolation among the elderly, provide spaces for youth ministry and community groups, or deliver outreach services for vulnerable families.

**These examples highlight the kind of needs that could be met if the schools amalgamated, but are not intended to reflect preferred or confirmed options.**

If the proposal was approved, the parish would undertake comprehensive feasibility assessments to evaluate models such as adaptive reuse, long-term community service leases, or mission-aligned joint ventures. This approach would respect local heritage and ensure that the Mittagong site directly embodies Christ's love for the vulnerable, the frail, and the marginalised for generations to come.

# Moving forward in hope

**All parents, staff, and parishioners are warmly invited to submit their feedback and share their perspectives before 30 November 2026.**

**Parents and carers:** Through the online consultation form (provided directly by the school) and/or by making representation to your school's P&F office holders who will represent parents and carers at a rountable discussion.

**School staff:** Through the staff consultation form and/or at the school staff roundtable discussion.

**Parishioners:** Through the parishioner consultation form and/or by making representation to the Parish Finance Council who will represent parishioners at a roundtable discussion.

**A copy of the consultation form questions is provided on the next page.**

# Consultation form questions

**The questions below are a copy of the questions asked in the consultation forms distributed to parents and carers, school staff, and parishioners. This is provided for informational purposes only and is not an active consultation form.**

**What is your level of support for transitioning from two one-stream schools to a single two-stream school?**

- ☐ Unsupportive
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Supportive

**What potential benefits do you see in a combined two-stream school? (Select all that apply)**

- ☐ Greater peer diversity and larger social circles for children
- ☐ Increased teacher collaboration and shared stage planning
- ☐ Expanded extracurricular programs
- ☐ Dedicated learning support and extension specialists
- ☐ Better continuity of school funding, modern resources, and technology
- ☐ Other: _____

**What are your main concerns regarding a consolidated school campus? (Select all that apply)**

- ☐ Travel time, bus links, and daily commute between Mittagong and Bowral
- ☐ Morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up traffic congestion
- ☐ Potential loss of the "small school" personal feel
- ☐ Peer group disruption during the initial transition period
- ☐ Financial costs (new uniforms, transition costs)
- ☐ Other: _____

**Which proposed pastoral services do you believe are most needed in the Southern Highlands? (Select up to 2)**

- ☐ Affordable / independent seniors living (especially for single women/ modest incomes)
- ☐ Disability and adult respite care
- ☐ Allied health and therapeutic support services
- ☐ Multi-generational community connection and gathering spaces
- ☐ Other: _____

**How supportive are you of the parish seeking ways to support these broader parish and community needs?**

- ☐ Unsupportive
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Supportive

**How supportive are you of repurposing the Mittagong school campus to support these broader parish and community needs?**

- ☐ Unsupportive
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Supportive

**Please expand on your answers. (Optional)**

**What other feedback, ideas, or conditions do you feel are essential for Bishop Brian to consider when deciding whether to proceed with the proposed amalgamation? (Optional)**