



Friday 12 September 2025

Statement from Tom Sexton, Executive Director, announcing closure of Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School, Murtoa

It is with a deep sense of sadness that Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Ltd (DOBCEL) has made the difficult decision to close Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School, Murtoa, at the end of the 2025 school year. This decision has been made in the context of a forecast 2026 enrolment below the regulatory requirement for a minimum of 11 students.

Principal Chris McCumstie, along with his entire staff, have worked tirelessly in recent years to promote the unique strengths of the school and grow enrolments. Despite these sustained efforts, broader support from the local community has not materialised to the extent required to ensure the school's long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, we remain proud of the commitment and passion shown by our team and continue to believe strongly in the value we offer to families.

This has been, and continues to be, a particularly challenging time for our Principal Chris McCumstie, who, with a deep personal investment in the school as both a leader and a parent, has navigated this period with unwavering dedication and professionalism.

I have met with the staff and parents of Our Lady's to discuss the best way to ensure the students continue to receive the high-quality Catholic education they deserve. The families with children who are impacted by the decision to close the school will be supported in their preferred Catholic school choice for 2026, with our other Catholic schools in the Wimmera region ready to welcome and embrace the families of Our Lady's.

Similarly, the staff of Our Lady's will be fully supported to understand their options and career opportunities, including redeployment within other Catholic schools in the Diocese, if desired.

Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School was founded by local Catholics in 1963, as a part of what is now the St Paul VI Catholic Parish. Originally staffed by the Brigidine Sisters, it has a proud tradition of providing a high-quality, personalised Catholic education. To this day, the school supports rich and engaging learning across academic, creative, spiritual and physical domains with a commitment to the education and formation of the whole child.

We are deeply grateful to the dedicated teachers, principals and parishioners who have enabled the school's endurance for over 62 years.

Above all, we must acknowledge the families who chose to support Our Lady's, recognising their deep care and commitment to nurturing their children to grow and flourish.

Celebrations to recognise the contribution of the school and all who have played a part in its rich history will be planned during the remainder of the year.

DOBCEL continues to advocate for the important role that small Catholic schools play in rural and remote areas as they provide parental choice in education and make a valuable contribution to supporting vibrant local communities.

I take solace in the fact that Catholic education throughout the Diocese of Ballarat continues to grow, now educating almost 19,000 students across 63 schools.

I ask for your prayerful support and understanding as we navigate this challenging time together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. P. Sexton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Sexton
Executive Director