HOLY SPIRIT COLLEGE

A fee-free, safe, welcoming non-traditional education setting where relationships and wellbeing take priority to improve education and life outcomes.

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Holy Spirit College Cooktown and Cairns

Principals Welcome



Welcome to Holy Spirit College. This booklet has been developed to assist parents, guardians and community organisations to understand the important and transformative work undertaken by Holy Spirit College to reengage young people with their communities and learning. This document is a summary of the beliefs, practices and processes that underpin our work in supporting some of the most vulnerable young people in our community. Our college has three sites located at Edmonton (Day School), Manoora (Day School) and Cooktown (Day School and Boarding).

Holy Spirit College is a fee-free learning environment that prides itself on creating a safe and inclusive *healing* environment. Our aim is to deliver a much-needed alternative approach to education for young people aged 12-18 years for whom a mainstream education setting is too overwhelming.

Our Holy Spirit College staff prioritise the formation of strong relationships to create a safe learning environment, where Wellbeing, Literacy and Numeracy are core learning areas. This is evident in our common ground approach, where staff emphasise power with, not power over learning strategies; building each young person's capacity to think for themselves and make positive personal and relational choices. This work is brought to life through the Holy Spirit College principles of Right Relationships, Respect, Responsibility and Participation, providing a pro-social framework for transformative conversations and decision making. This approach is grounded in the belief that every young person can learn, and that this is best achieved through a focus on their unique strengths and gifts.

Since 2015, Holy Spirit College has successfully supported many young people who found themselves lost within or outside of the education system; supporting them to build self-confidence, strong relationships and to develop their strengths to move towards a life goal. Over the years, these have included a return to traditional Secondary education, certificate courses, TAFE, traineeships, volunteering, work experience, apprenticeships, and getting a job.

It is my sincere hope that you find within the uniqueness of the caring, trauma informed, relational focused philosophies of Holy Spirit College, an environment where your young person can thrive.

Dr Lucas Felstead
College Principal

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Our Vision

WithGuGu, Wulungulbor, our Holy Spirit family welcomes young people from diverse backgrounds to empower them to be the best versions of themselves through providing meaningful learning opportunities for personal growth.

GuGu: Guugu Yimithirr – spending time with God/prayer/spiritual relationship/conversation and connection.
Wulungulbor: Gimuy-Walubarra Yidi - God





Our Purpose

With the aspirations of the young people at the centre of our work, Holy Spirit College seeks to promote the spiritual, cultural, social, emotional, academic, and physical growth of those for whom a mainstream education is not currently accessible. Guided by trauma informed best practices and the love of Christ, Holy Spirit College provides a space where young people are welcomed with unconditional regard, utilising Individual Education Plans (IEP) to pursue each young person's life aspirations.



Our College Principles

Central to the Gospel is the foundational belief that **each person is made in the image and likeness of God.** Respecting the dignity of each young person, Holy Spirit College seeks to empower each learner through utilising four key *common good* principles that are grounded in the Catholic Social teachings. These College Principles inform all aspects of college life, providing **a consistent and powerful language for developing a mental framework that promotes increased learner self-awareness, self-control and healthier relationships.**

Our four principles are:

- RELATIONSHIPS
- RESPECT
- RESPONSIBILITY
- PARTICIPATION

Our principles inform how members of our Holy Spirit College community interact with eachother cultivating positive,genuine,meaningful working relationships between staff, young people and their families.

Young Person Commitment

In understanding that many of our young people have struggled to access education within a context governed by too many rules and people *telling* them what to do, Holy Spirit College is designed to deliver transformative educational opportunities through a focus on self-empowerment strategies and skills. We choose a *power with*, and not a *power over* approach, walking alongside our young people following the philosophy of common ground. For this approach to work, all members of the Holy Spirit College community need to commit to respecting the rights of others to a safe learning environment. Therefore, upon enrolment, each young person is required to sign a Young Person Commitment, outlining those behaviours that jeopardise community safety and therefore membership within the community. As a college, we don't have rules, but we do need to be a safe place for all.

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Learning & Teaching

Holy Spirit College **provides educational pathways** designed to meet the identified strengths and goals of each young person, as documented in their Individual Education Plans (IEP's). IEP's are co-constructed between the young people and staff with a focus on improving outcomes. Each young person will have a unique spiritual, cultural, social, emotional, academic and physical learning and transition pathway which may include:

- **Continued learning at Holy Spirit College, return to mainstream or Boarding school when ready,**
- **Participating in TAFE at school, recognised training or short courses like First Aid, RSA, Barista**
- **or White Card,**
- **Build work readiness through work experience, volunteering, industry tasters and digital learning,**
- **Explore part-time, casual work, school-based apprenticeships, traineeships or entry level job opportunities,**
- **Grow their prosocial life skills, including budgeting transport, housing, digital identity and communication,**
- **Strengthening cultural and community connections through elders, mentors, sports, arts, local groups.**

As each young person's life and goals may change over time, the IEP's are continually reviewed.

Holy Spirit College utilises **a multi-disciplinary approach** in providing learning experiences **to meet the diverse learning needs of our learners.** The intention of the learning experiences/sessions at Holy Spirit College is to **empower young people** to develop their personal capabilities and responsibilities to achieve and access educational and/or employment opportunities. Therefore, our work initially aims to develop 'ready to learn' skills. This is achieved through the provision of a highly modified college timetable that promotes opportunities for **movement, engagement** with the outdoors, **self-exploration** and **self-expression** through the Arts and timetabled **student wellbeing check-ins.**

For those young people already proficient in these 'ready to learn' skills, the college has a strong focus on explicitly teaching and improving their skills in Wellbeing, Literacy and Numeracy. Those young people over the age of 15-years may also focus on their transitional pathway towards work, further formal education opportunities or engagement with community support organisations.

Relationships & Connection

The Holy Spirit College educational approach is one based in connection and relationship. There are many different ways we go about achieving this, these include:



Young people check-ins – These occur several times a day, where staff take time to sit with young people in smaller groups to check-in with how they are feeling. It also provides a great opportunity to develop an awareness and language around emotions along with strategies they can use to resolve issues or conflicts.

Working Agreements – These are utilised for each activity at the college, providing the young people a voice in determining what the principles of Right Relationship, Respect, Responsibility and Participation will look like during each activity. This empowers each individual whilst establishing strong communal expectations.



Circle-up – This is where the whole site comes together in a circle to celebrate success, communicate or conduct a whole site check-in.

Operation by Principles (OBP) conversation – These occur multiple times a day where staff use the language of the College principles to affirm positive behaviours or encouraging the young person to consider alternative behaviours.

These are calm conversations that empower the young people.

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Collaborative Problem-Solving (CPS) conversations – These occur when a young person has repeatedly exhibited behaviours that are not in line with the principles or has engaged in a major incident. This may be led by a Mentor or Head of Campus. The meeting encourages the young person to identify the behaviour of concern and come up with alternatives to their behaviour.

Parent and guardian communication – The majority of communication coming out of the college will be positive. We love celebrating the daily successes of our mentors and young people. These will be sent out via our **Holy Spirit College Facebook and Instagram** posts. **Letters and emails** from various members of the College teaching, boarding and administration staff will be used to communicate other matters directly with parents and guardians.

Semester Reports - Each student will receive a College Semester Report at the end of each semester. These are strength-based reports, highlighting the growth and successes of each young person.

Boarding Mentor – This is for Cooktown boarding students only. Each boarding student is appointed a mentor who is a member of the boarding staff. The role of a mentor is to be an informal link between the student, family and day school. This mentor will visit and call parents and guardians throughout the year to build a long-term relationship, to better support the needs of the boarders.

Parent/Guardian contact - All parents and guardians are welcome to contact the college at any time, and this applies especially to parents of boarders. The best way to contact staff is by calling the Administration Officers at each site who will pass on your message to the appropriate staff member straight away.



Boarding

The Holy Spirit College – Cooktown boarding houses are considered more than just a place to live, as we believe we are a unique community of staff and young people from the Cooktown, Hopevale and Wujal Wujal communities. **We provide x2 boarding houses in Cooktown catering for x16 female and x16 male boarders, Monday to Friday.** Each house is co-located on the landscaped bush setting of 1 Burkitt St, Cooktown, within the Holy Spirit College - Cooktown day school. The facilities are modern, twin share rooms, with access to shared toilets, showers, a common room with Netflix and plenty of outdoor space for basketball, engaging in craft activities or relaxing on the soft grass.

The Holy Spirit College boarding houses are fee-free for young people who are Abstudy eligible.

All meals are provided for boarding students. These are prepared by our amazing friendly catering staff who ensure that each young person receives high quality nutritious meals.

Outside of school hours, our boarders have access to a wide variety of extracurricular activities including fishing, beach walks, swimming at the pool, Cooktown library, visiting the PCYC for sport and visiting the shops once per week. Our boarders are also taught organisational and time management skills, as well as practical life-skills skills, such as personal hygiene, cooking, cleaning and washing their clothes.

Our boarding staff are experienced professionals from diverse backgrounds including First Nations staff that live within the Cooktown community. They undertake regular training to ensure that the young people are looked after in a facility that is safe and run to a high standard.



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Living together - all boarders are expected to behave within the principles set out by the college. These include Right Relationship, Respect, Responsibility and Participation. As a boarding facility, the zone of tolerance for behaviours that do not align with the principles is smaller as we are deeply committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our boarders. The use of illicit substances, engagement in sexualised behaviours and willful damage of property will result in the boarder returning home and may result in exclusion from boarding.

Medical and Dental – Holy Spirit College has processes in place to ensure that all students have access to appropriate First Aid and management of medication. We also have a productive relationship with the local Cooktown health services. An unwell student will receive First Aid and be assessed to determine if an appointment to see a doctor or dentist is required.

There will be times when a student is required to attend a medical appointment. The College will happily arrange transport to medical appointments.

Mobile phones - The College understands that many young people feel a need to have access to a mobile phone to maintain contact with their parents and friends. However, the use of phones is restricted whilst at boarding, as we want our young people to focus on developing face-to-face relationships with their peers and staff. Therefore, all boarders hand their mobile phones in to the boarding staff before bed at 8pm, and can collect them again after day school the following day at 2pm.

Parents need to be aware that the preferred time for them to be calling their young person whilst at boarding is between 2pm and 8pm daily.





Key Dates 2026

Term1

Monday 19 January- Office opens
Monday 26 January - Australia Day Public Holiday
Wednesday 28 January - First Day of School Term 1
Tuesday 17 February - Shrove Tuesday
Wednesday 18 February - Ash Wednesday
Friday 20 February - Cooktown Student Free Day
Monday 23 February - Edmonton & Manoora Student Free Day
11 - 20 March - NAPLAN 2026
Thursday 19 March - National Closing the Gap Day
Wednesday 25 March - Harmony Day/Community Feedback Day
Thursday 26 March - St Monica's Cathedral Commissioning Mass (5-6pm)
Wednesday 1 April - Cooktown Last Day Term 1
Thursday 2 April - Edmonton & Manoora Last Day Term 1
Friday 3 April - Good Friday Public Holiday
Sunday 5 April - Easter Sunday
3 April - 18 April - School Holiday Period

Term 2

Monday 20 April -First Dayof Term 2
Monday 4 May - Labour Day Public Holiday
Friday 22 May - Holy Spirit College Feast Day
26 May - 3 June - Reconciliation Week
Monday 8 June - International Best Friends Day
Friday 12 June - Cooktown Student Free Day
Thursday 25 June - Cooktown, Edmonton & Manoora Last Day Term 2
Friday 26 June - Cooktown Show Day
Friday 26 June - Edmonton & Manoora Student Free Day
27 June - 12 July - School Holiday Period

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Key Dates 2026

Term3

Monday 13 July - FirstDay ofSchool Term 3
Friday 17 July - Cooktown Student Free Day
Friday 17 July - Cairns Show Public Holiday
Wednesday 22 July - Cooktown Careers Fair
27 - 31 July - Catholic Education Week
27 - 31 July - Holy Spirit College NAIDOC Week
Friday 7 August - Ferderal Census Day
Monday 10 August - Edmonton & Manoora Student Free Day
10 - 14 August - Bullying No-Way Week
Friday 14 August - Cooktown Student Free Day
Wednesday 2 September - Indigenous Literacy Day
7 - 11 September - Child Protection Week
Thursday 10 September - RUOK Day/Community Feedback Day
Friday 18 September - Last Day Term 3
19 September - 3 October - School Holiday Period

Term 4

Monday 5 October- King's Birthday Public Holiday
Tuesday 6 October - First Day of School Term 4
Saturday 10 October - World Mental Health Day
Saturday 31 October - Halloween
Sunday 1 November - All Saints Day
Monday 2 November - All Souls Day
Wednesday 11 November - Remembrance Day
Thursday 26 November - End of Year Celebration Day

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Thank You!

"It'sawholelotmoreproductivetobeinproblem-solvingmodethan it is to be in behaviour modification mode."

Dr. RossGreene

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