The 293rd Meeting of the Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales was held on 22 February 2008 in the Taylor/Barlow Rooms, Polding Centre, Level 8, 133 Liverpool Street Sydney. The meeting was chaired by Bishop David Walker.

A Summary Report of the Commission meeting is provided below:

1. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Transition from Interest Subsidy Scheme – NSW Government Decision

In the 2007/08 State Budget on 19 June 2007, the NSW Government announced that it was abolishing the Interest Subsidy Scheme (ISS) with immediate effect and replacing it with a Capital Grant Program. This decision had the effect of placing in jeopardy the building and refurbishment plans of many Catholic and other non-government schools whose financial planning already included provision for an interest subsidy.

CEC, in conjunction with the AIS, submitted a joint proposal to the State Government seeking fairer transition arrangements for schools whose building plans were immediately affected by this decision.

The Minister's Office formally advised the CEC in late December 2007 that the Cabinet had accepted the CEC/AIS submission. The CEC and AIS are continuing discussions with the NSW Government to progress a number of details around how the eligible schools will access the scheme, as well as development of Guidelines for the new Building Grants Assistance Scheme.

Annual Registration Fees for Supporting Overseas Students

CEC is the approved CRICOS provider in respect of the enrolment of overseas students in the majority of NSW Catholic schools and recently paid the annual registration charge ($18,604 for 2008) to DEST.

In addition, DET NSW levies an annual charge as part of its VETAB process for accrediting courses undertaken by overseas students. In the past this charge has been levied on the basis of the number of courses a provider is approved to deliver ($690 for CEC in 2007).

The minimum charge for 2008 will be $3120 but could be as high as $22,000 if DET levy the charge on the basis of the number of NSW Catholic sector RTOs. Until now, the Commission has absorbed these registration charges but if the increase is at the upper end, it may be necessary to consider distributing these costs across the dioceses and schools enrolling overseas students.

The Commission Secretariat will be holding a forum for dioceses and schools involved in the enrolment of overseas students on 27 March 2008, which will be a valuable opportunity to assess the impact of complying with the (Revised) National Code, which came into effect on 1 July 2007.
Restrictive Local Government Planning Regulations

The NSW Government is currently making significant amendments to local planning laws. There has been much media controversy not least over the role of the Minister for Planning, Frank Sartor, to override local government planning provisions.

The AIS has identified that one of the new provisions designed to make for more efficient and faster planning approvals by local councils discriminates against non-government schools. Some councils have been using it to restrict use of land not zoned for educational use by non-government schools.

The recently gazetted State Environmental Planning Policy (Infrastructure) 2007 (sections 28 and 29) provides for exemptions for a ‘public authority’ to local government decisions. The AIS and CEC have proposed to Minister Sartor that these sections should also include exemption for a ‘registered non-government school’.

Enrolments 2008 - Preliminary (comparison to August 2007)

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<td>Feb-08</td>
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The preliminary 2008 enrolments continue the trend of recent years of decreasing primary enrolments in non-metropolitan dioceses (except for Parramatta).

Commonwealth Review of SES Funding Model

The Commonwealth’s review of the SES funding model to which NCEC contributed in 2006 was never released by the previous Minister, Julie Bishop. Recently, a copy of the report was leaked to the Sydney Morning Herald and formed the basis for a series of critical articles on non-government school funding (January 9, 10 and 25 and February 6, 9, 11 and 12), plus an opinion piece and editorial, but without anyone else having access to the report itself. On 12 February 2008, the SMH reported that the Deputy Prime Minister had announced there would be a review of the SES system although there is no documented confirmation of this decision. The fact remains that there are deficiencies in the SES model but ‘funding maintenance’ which applies mainly to Catholic schools, including the Catholic systems, is not one of them. Catholic schools need to be assured that Commonwealth funding is secure at its present level, at least, for the quadrennium 2009-12. Any review of the funding model would not have effect before 2013.

MOU with the Department of Energy and Climate Change
A Memorandum of Understanding between CEC and the Department of Climate Change (DECC) was signed on 30 January 2008. The MOU agrees to a three year commitment by both parties to the Sustainable Schools NSW program. It enables a sharing of resources to support cross-sectoral initiatives by dioceses, diocesan schools and congregational schools. The MOU allows either party to terminate the agreement with three months notice.

**2007 Brother John Taylor Awards**

There are two annual awards in the name of Brother John Taylor, previous Executive Director of the CEC and member of the Board of Studies who died in 1993: one awarded by the CEC for outstanding achievement in Catholic education in NSW; one awarded by the NSW Board of Studies for a student who overcomes extreme personal adversity to achieve in the HSC.

The 2007 winners are:

**CEC Award to be presented on 11 March at the Berne Centre:**

Br Michael Flanagan, fms, Principal of the Berne Education Centre. The award was made in acknowledgement of the wonderful work that has been done with young people at the Berne Centre who have been able to access quality education and intervention programs that would have otherwise have been denied them and who have been given skills and the confidence to pursue careers after leaving the Centre.

**Board of Studies Award – two students honoured with awards to be presented at Parliament House on 28 February 2008:**

Samantha Dickson, from Bega High School who is enrolled at Macquarie University this year. Samantha had her schooling constantly interrupted by family instability and difficulties with accommodation. Most recently she has had serious health problems, which have significantly reduced her life expectancy.

Andrei Gudas, from Sydney Technical High School who is enrolled at University of Technology in 2008. Andrei was forced to repeat Yr12 because of serious health problems (a variant of Crohn’s disease), which also recurred in his repeat year (2007), but he was able to continue his studies and almost achieved an All-Rounders award.

**2. COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP**

Bishop Walker advised that Mr Graeme Mundine had resigned from the Commission. A search will soon begin to fill the position of Indigenous Commissioner.

Dr Kristin Johnston was appointed Deputy Chair for 2008.

The Commission appointed Mr Alan Bowyer as a member of the CEC Audit & Risk Committee for three years.

Nominations were called from commissioners to chair the three main CEC Committees for 2008 – Education Policy, School Resources and Religious Education – to be decided at the 19 March 2008 Commission meeting.

The Commission also called for nominations for the appointment of a female member of the School Resources Committee – to be decided at the 19 March 2008 Commission meeting.

**3. STANDING COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS**
The Commission considered the decisions of the NSW Bishops and agreed to accept them *in principle*. There was concern to promote collaborative approaches to religious education across all dioceses and the role of the Diocesan RE Directors was advocated. There was particular concern about the provision of Catholic religious education for Catholic students in state schools and Bishop Walker undertook to raise again this matter with the NSW Bishops. The Commission regards RE strategy as a high priority, particularly with regard to:

(a) maintaining the Catholicity of Catholic schools at a high and consistent standard across NSW;
(b) ensuring good quality Catholic pastoral care for Catholic students in state schools; and,
(c) addressing, together with CCRESS, the needs of Catholic students in state schools.

The Commission resolved to disband the Standing Committee for Religious Education from a time sufficient to allow the Committee to complete its current agenda, which is estimated to be June 2008. It was also agreed that from that time, the Education Policy Committee will assume responsibility for the provision of Religious Education policy advice to the Commission. The Commission noted that a new Vatican document on Catholic education will be tabled at its 19 March 2008 meeting.

4. **COMMONWEALTH TRADE TRAINING CENTRES IN SCHOOLS**

In considering this Paper, Commissioners were concerned that one of the likely consequences of this new Trade Training Centres in Schools Program is to redirect substantial amounts of School funds into more vocationally oriented programs from other priorities. This strategy is in contrast to the current and historical Catholic school structure, which is aimed at providing comprehensive education under a Catholic ethos, in each of its schools. This approach contrasts with the NSW government system where specialist high schools sit beside comprehensive facilities and some high schools have strong links with the TAFE sector.

The Federal Government is moving quickly on this Program. DEEWR has committed to wide consultation. The CEC is reviewing the draft Partnership Agreement and is providing feedback to the NCEC. There is some suggestion that the NCEC will be the contract authority for the Catholic system across Australia for this Program.

Current advice is that grants will be for capital only, may include equipment and will not be indexed. There will be no funds for recurrent costs. Interest on grants may be used for administration.

DEEWR may likely approve initial grants *in principle*, allowing time for capital facilities to be planned and designed and obtain DA building approvals.

Diocesan and Congregational schools will need to group and partner with the TAFE and industry and in some cases with state schools in order to submit applications. First approvals will be given to schools that can get started quickly.

The CEC will run a forum on 27 March 2008, arising from the work of VEAG, to assist dioceses and congregations to identify opportunities and respond quickly to this Program. The CEC will also work closely with DEEWR, the NCEC and the non government sector on this matter.

5. **2008 VET FUNDING ALLOCATIONS**
The Commission approved distribution of $1,337,745 from the 2008 VET in Schools Program to dioceses. The Commission also approved distribution of $2,307,240 from the 2008 TVET Program to diocesan education offices and congregations.

6. 2008 AGQTP FUNDING ALLOCATIONS
The Commission approved distribution of $1,332,608 from the 2008 AGQTP Program to diocesan education offices and congregational schools.

7. COMMISSION EVALUATION OF CEC PERFORMANCE
The Commission noted the report summarising views of individual Commissions on the effectiveness of the Commission and Secretariat and that the Australian Bishops will be reviewing the NCEC in 2008.

Commissioners discussed the emerging national education agenda. The Australian Government is using funding to change priorities within education across the government and non-government sectors. Commissioners considered that the present Australian Government has an historic and unique opportunity to improve Commonwealth/State relations on key issues such as education. This is welcomed by the Commission.

8. NATIONAL CURRICULUM BOARD
Commissioners discussed the establishment of a National Curriculum Board. Setting the national school curriculum will be undertaken by the new Board and the Curriculum Corporation will continue to have responsibility for national assessments. The National Curriculum Board will therefore have one focus and work in conjunction with the State Boards of Studies.

The Commission confirmed its view that national assessments and national curriculum should be carried out by the one national body. The Commission also noted that the NCEC and ISCA will be jointly making recommendations to the Federal Education Minister for the appointment of three members of the National Curriculum Board from the non government education sectors.

9. NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL COMPUTER FUND
The National Secondary School Computer Fund was a core election commitment for the incoming Federal Government. A first inventory of computer equipment in secondary schools has been prepared and provided to DEEWR. First grants are intended to ensure that all Years 9 to 12 students each have access to a computer and that existing computers are less than four years old. Grants will probably be made to the Catholic Block Grant Authority for distribution to diocesan and congregational schools. These grants will be tied to the first round inventory to ensure the Government’s election commitment is met. It is likely that there will be minimum conditions attached to first round grants.

CEC is working with Dioceses and Congregations on the second audit. This audit covers capacity and internet access. There is no information on the form of the second round grants and what conditions will be attached. Each school will need to develop an ICT Plan.

The Commission welcomes computer grants being made to schools on a needs basis to ensure that all school students have a consistent and equal platform for computer learning.

The Commission noted that the four year computer fund is not indexed and that associated infrastructure such as electricity supply is not funded. The Commission is concerned that this funding method would result in possible redirection of existing scarce recurrent funds to this very worthwhile program at the expense of other priorities. The Commission requested that the CEC Secretariat develop procurement strategies to ensure that the benefits of these computer grants are fully realised.

10. DOCS COMMISSION OF REVIEW: CEC RESPONSES
The Commission agreed with widening of the net for employment screening, as advocated by CCER, to include all staff associated with schools. The Commission resolved to put in a submission to the Wood Inquiry in conjunction with the CSSA. The Commission fully supports its Centacare colleagues on issues related to the management of child protection and noted that some Diocesan Centacare Offices are providing submissions to the Wood Inquiry.

The Commission requested a short focused survey of CEOs and Congregational schools on mandatory reporting. The focus of the Survey should cover how DoCS responds to reports, particularly in relation to secondary school students.

11. **2008 AGQTP IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The Commission endorsed the cross sectional 2008 AGQTP Implementation Plan developed by CEC, AIS and CEC.

12. **CEC ANIMAL RESEARCH AUTHORITY 2007 – 2010**

The Commission agreed to renew CEC’s role as an Animal Research Establishment under the NSW Animal Research Act for the period ending November 2010.

13. **NCEC PRIVACY REVIEW SUBMISSION**

The Commission noted and endorsed the NCEC Privacy law Review submission to the Australian Law reform Commission.

14. **CEC RTA ROAD SAFETY AND DRUG EDUCATION GRANTS**

The Commission endorsed the distribution of these 2008 grants to diocesan education offices.

15. **CEC ANIMAL RESEARCH ESTABLISHMENT**

The Commission agreed to renew CEC’s role as an Animal Research Establishment under the NSW Animal Research Act for the period ending November 2010.

16. **MARSH INSURANCE COVER – WORK EXPERIENCE FOR SCHOOLS**

The Commission endorsed the renewal of the employer indemnity cover with QBE through Marsh, for work experience and work placement programs conducted in NSW Catholic Secondary Schools.

John Kitney  
**Secretary to the Commission**  
12 March 2008