SUMMARY REPORT

The 294th Meeting of the Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales was held on 19 March 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

Brother John Taylor Award

On 11 March 2008 Bishop Walker presented the CEC’s 2007 Brother John Taylor Award for Excellence in Catholic Education to Br Michael Flanagan fms, the founding principal of the John Berne Education Centre at Lewisham. The ceremony was held in the Centre’s Champagnat Room. 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 been denied them and who have been given skills and the confidence to pursue careers after leaving the Centre. The CEC was represented by Brian Croke, John Kitney, and Gerry Gray.

Public Policy Committee

The Public Policy Committee, chaired by Br Kelvin Canavan, met on 10 March 2008 and gave attention to the new Commonwealth programs for schools, the recent Sydney Morning Herald coverage of ‘secret reports’ on both the SES funding model for non-government schools and government school principals’ claims of growing racial segregation in schools and the report to NCEC, on the changing sectoral trends of schooling over the past 25 years (1962 to 2007). It was noted that an updated version of the funding facts leaflet has now been prepared and will be forwarded to Catholic education authorities and schools for distribution.

Transition from State Interest Subsidy to Building Grants Program

Further consultations have been held with senior officers from the DET in relation to the administration of the Government’s decision to support the CEC/AIS submission on schools caught in the transition from the State Interest Subsidy Scheme and the Building Grants Program. The schools listed in the submission will now be eligible to submit an application for interest subsidy, when their project is ready, under the rules for the old scheme over the next year to three years (up to June 2011). The interest rebate rate for these applications will be 5.5% as opposed to the pre-Budget rate of 7.5%, and applies up to a 20 year loan term and the current conditions of the scheme. The CEC and AIS are continuing discussions with the NSW Government around the development of guidelines for the new Building Grants Program.
Farewell to Professor Gordon Stanley

Professor Gordon Stanley has completed 10 years as President of the NSW Board of Studies and an official farewell was held for him on 18 March 2008 at which CEC and Catholic education authorities in NSW were well represented. In addition, Brian Croke hosted a small dinner for Gordon, which involved Catholic school personnel who have worked most closely with him over the years. During his time as President, major curriculum and syllabus changes have been introduced by the Board.

Consultation with Association of Catholic School Principals

A consultation was undertaken with the Association of Catholic School Principals on 22 February 2008. The primary focus was the implementation of the Commonwealth’s Digital Agenda and the implementation of the National Assessment Plan (NAP). The National Curriculum Board, Schools Computer Fund and Broadband strategy were all addressed but there was particular interest in the Commonwealth Trade Training Centres. Regarding the NAP, the briefing covered the procedures for 2008 and the matters to be resolved in the future. The briefing on the National Benchmarking Tuition Plan (“Even Start”) covered arrangements for 2008.

Computers in Examinations Seminar

On 13 March 2008, the NSW Board of Studies conducted a seminar entitled Computers in Examinations. Minister Della Bosca opened the seminar by indicating the State Government’s view that computers would play an increasing role in examinations in the future, noting the Commonwealth’s Digital Revolution. He indicated that he saw the seminar’s function as providing policy direction for the future. Speakers from the Board of Studies, DET and UTS demonstrated the progress made in trialling the different ways digital devices have been used in creating in test item banks and assessment tasks. The seminar was concluded by Professor Gordon Stanley who indicated that he would recommend a five year time scale to the State Government for large scale introduction of computers into high stakes testing.

Chemicals in Schools

The CEC provides access to Chemwatch (http://www.chemwatch.net/) for Catholic schools in NSW and four schools in the ACT. Chemwatch provides advice on the use and disposal of chemicals. This service is of particular use to secondary schools for Science and Design and Technology subjects. The cost for the annual renewal for 2008 is $11,440. Canberra & Goulburn reimburse the CEC $400 to cover the cost to the ACT schools.

NCEC Disability Consultation

On 3 and 4 March 2008, NCEC disability contacts from each State and Territory Commission met at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney, to discuss current issues and explore possible national Catholic approaches to them. Key issues which emerged were: continued increase in students identified with disabilities; particular increase in students with disorders relating to language acquisition and socio-emotional development, often resulting in mental health issues; increasing load on schools in coping with students with medical conditions as opposed to disabilities; lack of inclusion of students with disabilities (other than the early intervention (0-5) project for students with Autism) in any of the current Federal Government education initiatives.
Because current arrangements are inequitable, it was agreed that funds are needed to match the increase in numbers and the associated resource needs. State officers were particularly interested in the development by CEC of an on-line assessment tool, which enables a consistent approach to the identification of students into categories of low, medium and high support need. It was agreed that this type of data needed to be put to government(s) as a way forward. A number of States and Territories have asked for further briefings on the CEC tool.

2. **VET STRATEGIES**

The Commission agreed on the agenda for its 27 March 2008 Forum on Strategic Directions for VET. The Commission noted that future Secondary School offerings were dependent on strategic planning for population growth and that mapping of trade requirements is the responsibility of the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET). The Commission requested the CEC Secretariat to pursue planning information to inform consideration of the issues.

The Commission requested an initial report on the outcomes from the 27 March 2008 Forum to be tabled at its April meeting. The Commission noted that further reports, together with advice from both VEAG and the Education Policy Committee, will be provided to a later meeting of the Commission.

3. **CEC RESOURCES POLICY COMMITTEE: ELECTION OF FEMALE MEMBER**

The Commission resolved to appoint Ms Helen Banham to the CEC Resources Committee for a period of three years.

4. **CEC COMMITTEES: APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

The Commission approved the appointments of:

1) Mr Brian Lacey as Chair of the Education Policy Committee; and,

2) Mr Peter Turner as Chair of the Resources Policy Committee, each for a period of twelve months; and,

3) Sr Ailsa Mackinnon as Chair of the Standing Committee on Religious Education in Schools until July 2008 when this Committee’s agenda will be subsumed within the responsibility of the Education Policy Committee.

5. **LICENCE FOR LEVEL 9, 133 LIVERPOOL STREET, SYDNEY**

The Commission approved a new five year licence for Level 9, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney, commencing 1 July 2008.

6. **WORKING PARTY ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

At its September 2007 meeting, the Commission considered a paper on *Environmental Issues & Catholic Schools*. The Commission authorised the Executive Director to establish a small group to further develop “CEC options for Action”. The Commission approved the proposed Terms of Reference and a Statement of Function at this meeting, with an agreed timetable to report back later in the year.
7. SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS BEING SCHOOLED AWAY FROM HOME

At its June and July 2007 meetings, the Commission approved the establishment of a project team to present a report on *Supporting Aboriginal Students being Schooled Away from Home* with the aim to establish guidelines for best practice in support for these students.

The Commission considered a progress report from the Working Party, noting the difficulty in obtaining data on Aboriginal students being schooled away from home. Students are being housed in a range of ways. Traditional housing such as School accommodation and Hostels are being used. Some sporting clubs are also providing support, including providing accommodation, in various ways to Aboriginal students.

The Commission requested a further report later in the year providing information on:

- the number of Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic Schools and what type of accommodation they are accessing;
- details on the communities from which these students are originating; and,
- support structures in place to support these students, including sporting clubs, and their effectiveness.

8. PEER ABUSE PROJECT: UPDATE

The Commission has been working with the Catholic Education and Social Welfare Co-ordinating Committee (CESWCC) for some time to develop strategies to identify and counter sexually abusive behaviour among children and young people, in both the education and social welfare sectors.

In March 2007 the CESWCC engaged Gerard Webster, Forensic and Counselling Psychologist to conduct the *Working with Children and Young People with Sexualised and Sexually Abusive Behaviours in a Non-Therapeutic Context* workshop in April 2007.

At this meeting, the Commission considered the draft report prepared by the CESWCC Working Party and Gerard Webster. The Commission was comfortable with the draft report and noted that a further report will be provided to the May 2008 meeting, following feedback from the Commission and other bodies being consulted.

The Commission observed that the draft report did not address Out of School Hours issues nor does it cover secondary victims of abuse. The Commission considers that there is a role for curriculum in dealing with abuse, through raising awareness, providing ideas for dealing with the issue when confronted and putting in place strategies to limit harm. The Commission also considered that the needs and role of Parents and other children in a family should be addressed.

9. EDUCATING TOGETHER IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: ISSUES FROM THE CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The Commission welcomed the Vatican paper *EDUCATING TOGETHER IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS - a shared mission between consecrated persons and the lay faithful*. The Commission noted that this paper builds on previous papers produced by the Congregation for Catholic Education. The Commission broke up into four groups, in order to fully explore the issues raised with as much input from individual commissioners as possible.
The Commission considers that generally there is excellent coordination between lay people and religious in ensuring that the spirit and teaching of Christ is present in Catholic schools in NSW. Individual commissioners highlighted sections of the Vatican paper that particularly spoke to them.

The Commission requested:

- the Education Policy Committee provide advice on how the new matters raised in this important Vatican paper can be best implemented within Catholic schools in NSW and report back; and,
- that the CEC Secretariat provide all Catholic education authorities in NSW with the link to this Vatican paper

10. NSW REVIEW OF SCHOOL LEAVING AGE: CEC RESPONSE ISSUES AND PROCESSES

Premier Iemma recently announced the State Government’s intention to increase the school leaving age from 15 to at least 16 years of age. The NSW Government consultation paper was made available widely. Minister Della Bosca called a Community Summit on the issue on 17 March 2008. Key Catholic educators attended.

The Commission noted that NSW currently permits children to leave school at fifteen. The Commission considers that the leaving age is just a number and is not the panacea. The key issues for educators are School retention, increasing the numeracy and literacy of children moving into the workforce and encouraging a culture of life time learning.

School retention is achieved by having schools that are friendly, fair, and clean, have flexible curricula, and have competent and caring educators. They should also provide positive reinforcement and mentoring in the school environment by a responsible adult. When achieved, this type of culture achieves better results in student performance and encourages lifetime learning.

The Commission considers that it is important to have structures in place, which identify potential early school leavers. Strategies can then be put into place to remedy those troubling matters that are hindering certain students from achieving their potential eg. poor literacy, lack of self esteem.

The Commission requested the Executive Director, with advice from the Education Policy Committee, to prepare a submission to the NSW Government on this matter, which is due for submission by 24 April 2008. The Commission requested that the draft submission be tabled at its April 2008 meeting.

11. NEW COMMONWEALTH PROGRAMS: UPDATE

The Commission noted that the An Even Start program is going ahead in 2008, with funding of $120 million. The success of the 2008 Program will drive Federal Government decisions for 2009.

Round One of the Computers In Secondary Schools program is about to be finalised. It is believed that sixty-eight NSW Catholic schools have been selected to apply for $14 million in funds. The condition precedent is that applicants must be able to guarantee that all computers purchased will be operational within six months. The CBGA will be the Contract Authority for these funds. The second audit is almost completed. There is a
potential copyright issue looming because the DEEWR paper encourages parental participation in school web portals.

In respect to Trades Training Centres In Schools, discussions on the DEEWR guidelines and the Partnership Arrangements between the Commonwealth and the Catholic Schools Sector are continuing. There is no certainty that there will be a representative from the Catholic education sector on the DEEWR State Assessment Panel. The Federal Education Minister appears to assume that the Catholic education sector accepts the recurrent cost arrangements inherent in the Program.

The Shared School Facilities Program involves an initial DEEWR consultation with CEC and Diocesan Catholic Education Offices, potentially to be affected by the Proposal. This consultation is likely to occur late March/early April 2008. The main potential beneficiaries of shared facilities appear to be developers. In this context, the point was made that the Catholic education sector should develop its own school site sharing capacity eg. K – 12 schools.

The Commission noted that the consultation processes on the appointments to the new National Curriculum Board have concluded. The Federal Education Minister is expected to announce Board membership by late March/early April 2008.

John Kitney
Secretary to the Commission
31 March 2008