SUMMARY REPORT

The 295th meeting of the Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales was held on 16 April 2008 in the Taylor/Barlow Rooms, Polding Centre, Level 8, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney. The meeting was chaired by Bishop David Walker DD.

A Summary Report of the Commission meeting is provided below:

1) **CEC Special Purpose Financial Statements to 31 December 2007**

The Commission considered and approved the CEC Special Purpose Financial Statements to 31 December 2007. These Special Purpose Financial Statements and the Audit Opinion will be incorporated into the 2007 CEC Annual Report.

2) **Vocational Education and Training in NSW Catholic Schools**

The CEC held a VET Forum on 27 March 2008, at which a wide range of Catholic educators participated. Several Commissioners also attended. The CEC will further develop issues raised at the Forum. A discussion paper is being developed and will be discussed at a Commission meeting mid year and a final report with recommendations is due by the end of 2008.

The form of funding for the new Trade Training Centres (TTCs) Program remains a key issue for the Commission. The Australian Government guidelines signal capital funds only and no funds for recurrent expenditure. Commissioners believe that significant cooperation is possible with TAFE colleges, which would meet the Australian Government’s objectives. However, this approach requires extra recurrent funds. Cooperation with TAFE colleges would limit duplication of facilities and would be more effective.

Applications for Phase I and Expressions of Interest for Phase II close on 9 May 2008. There will not be an automatic option for a school to make an application in October 2008 if they have not submitted an EOI by 9 May 2008.

There is still considerable detail to be worked through with Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) on funding agreements with system authorities and schools, the administrative role of Block Grant Authorities (BGAs), area and cost standards, facility/trade standards for proposed offerings and the role and composition of State and national assessment committees.

DEEWR has no guidelines on area and cost standards or facility/trade standards and is in effect leaving it to applicants for self-determination. All non-government school applications will be sent by DEEWR to the relevant State education department for initial comment.

The Catholic Bulk Grants Authority (CBGA) has strongly advised Diocesan offices and Congregational schools to cost and document applications for TTCs as much as possible in advance as any grants approved by the Minister will not be supplemented.
3) Secondary Schools Computer Fund

The National Secondary School Computer Fund provides grants of up to $1 million for schools to assist them to provide for new or upgraded computer technology for secondary students in Years 9 – 12. The first round of grants enables schools with a ratio of 1:8 (computers to students) to bring the ratio up to 1:2.

Round One applications from eligible schools closed with DEEWR on 4 April 2008 and applications from NSW Catholic Schools are currently being validated by the CBGA to ensure they meet the key criteria defined by the Australian Government. Since the CBGA is obliged to declare in writing that all relevant data has been verified as specified and that the information on each applicant school is true and correct, each System Authority or Congregational School Principal is being asked to verify their data.

All applicants have indicated that they will have their computers operational no later than six months after receipt of funding. The CBGA will be making block payments to the Diocesan offices for their eligible system schools.

DEEWR anticipates that it will be signing funding agreements with all BGAs by 26 May 2008 and that successful schools will be notified by 6 June 2008.

The CEC, NSW ICT Advisory Group has conducted surveys of Dioceses and Congregational schools to assist DEEWR in planning the rollout of grants. Second round applications will be processed from June 2008. CEC has prepared a digest of information for DEEWR covering School ICT Plans, broadband strategies, workforce capabilities, levels of infrastructure in place and the identification of needy schools.

4) Investing in our Schools Program (IOSP) - Final Round

The final round of the Australian Government IOSP.X (Extra Element) school/community grant applications closed with the CBGA on 11 April 2008. All eligible grant applications (226) were submitted by the due date. The CBGA is processing the applications to forward to DEEWR for ministerial approval. Grants range from $20,000 to $29,000. DEEWR has recently revised the requirements for opening ceremonies for all IOSP small projects, which means that Projects with grants of $50,000 or less in a funding round are now exempt from holding an opening ceremony. However, they are required to publicly recognise the grant funding by way of plaques and information in school newsletters. All grants over $50,000 (and projects with Capital Program grants over $75,000) are still required to have an official opening to which the Australian Government Minister is invited.

5) Distribution of Recurrent Grants – 2009 to 2013

When deciding on the current per capita distribution model in 2005, the NSW Bishops requested that the CEC mid 2008 provide recommendations on the distribution of recurrent grants for the next quadrennium. This means giving recommendations to the NSW Bishops meeting scheduled for 5 June 2008.

The CEC Resources Committee provided the Commission at this meeting with a first draft proposal for the 2009 to 2012 quadrennium. The Commission requested further refinement of the proposed model and report back to the 21 May 2008 Commission meeting.

6) Early Childhood Education Initiative

The Commission considered the Australian government’s Program for Early Childhood Education, widening education opportunities for four year olds. Commissioners welcomed
this new Program, which is consistent with some foreshadowed initiatives included in the NSW Bishops’ pastoral letter Catholic Schools at a Crossroads.

The NCEC Early Childhood Forum was held in Melbourne on 7 April 2008 and involved representation from State/Territory CECs and the DEEWR Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care. Issues discussed in the Forum included Catholic sector input into decision making, the role of State/Territory Education Departments, parental choice, access to capital and recurrent sources of funding, barriers to integrating pre-school/long day care centres with schooling and partnerships

What is emerging is the need for CEC to engage more actively with the NSW Government, in collaboration with Council of Catholic School Parents and Diocesan Directors, to ensure Catholic sector involvement in the new program and other related initiatives. DEEWR has also scheduled a meeting with CEC on implementation strategies in NSW Catholic schools

Commissioners are keen to understand how the new Program can be rolled out to enable universal access for four year olds. The Education Policy Committee has been requested to provide advice on how best for the CEC to participate in the Early Childhood Education Initiative. Regular reports will be considered by the Commission.

7) CEC Survey of Mandatory Reporting to DoCS

CEC and Catholic Social Services Australia have lodged a joint submission to the Woods Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection.

CEC has also surveyed Catholic schools about the responsiveness by DoCS to mandatory reporting. Interim survey data was discussed at this Commission meeting. The CEC Secretariat is reviewing that data and will provide an analysis of responses to a Commission meeting mid year.

8) Special Education Working Party

At its meeting on 19 March 2008, Commissioners agreed to establish a working party to review the allocation of special education funds across the Dioceses. At this meeting, Commissioners approved the terms of reference and membership of the group. A report making recommendations on a new funding model will be considered by the Commission later in the year.

9) School Attendance: New Legal Requirements

On 1 April 2008, the NSW Premier announced the Government’s intention to amend the NSW Education Act 1990, specifically with regard to the enforcement of compulsory attendance provisions. A key issue for Catholic schools is likely to be the proposed ‘Best Endeavours Orders’ which could require schools to take certain action to improve the attendance of a student or a group of students.

This new legislation provides an opportunity to address with the Government the outstanding issue of the lack of access by non-Government schools to the services of the Home School Liaison Officers (HSLO). Meanwhile, Catholic schools now provide attendance data as part of their national reporting requirements and the whole issue of poor school attendance is the subject of various national investigations.

Commissioners believe that Home School Liaison Officers have had a positive effect in breaking down barriers to school attendance in a wide range of circumstances.
Commissioners would like to see this State initiative extended to Catholic schools, which experience similar patterns of behaviour to those of State schools.

10) NSW School Leaving Age

Earlier this year, the NSW Premier announced the Government’s intention to raise the school leaving age in New South Wales. This matter was discussed at the 19 March 2008 Commission meeting and again at this meeting. The period for consultation has been extended from 24 April 2008 to 30 June 2008.

A proposed structure of the CEC submission was developed by the Education Policy Committee. The structure was discussed and confirmed at this Commission meeting. The finalised proposal will be provided to the 21 May 2008 Commission meeting, for endorsement.

11) NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into 9 to 14 year olds

The Commission discussed the Terms of Reference of the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into 9 to 14 year Olds and the issues identified by the CEC and Catholic Secondary Schools Association (CSSA) Working Group preparing a joint submission to the Inquiry. Commissioners considered that the Working Group had identified most of the key issues of concern to the Commission. The closing date for submissions is 5 May 2008. The Executive Director has been authorised to finalise the submission with the CSSA, taking Commissioners views into account.

12) The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy

The Commission discussed progress in the implementation of 2008 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy, which will be conducted on 13-15 May.

It is understood that there will be a common report to parents, which will show their child’s achievement against the national average.

13) Animal Research Authority 2008

The CEC is the accredited Animal Research Establishment for all NSW Catholic schools. This requires it to issue annually an Animal Research Authority and identifies those staff who are authorised by the School to use animals for research or teaching. The Commission endorsed the distribution to Catholic schools of the Animal Research Authorities for 2008.

14) Working Party on Environmental Issues

At its 19 March 2008 meeting, the Commission approved the establishment of a working Party, following its consideration of the paper Environmental Issues & Catholic Schools on 19 September 2007. The Commission at this meeting endorsed the terms of reference and membership. The Commission will consider a report on sustainable schools later in the year. Additionally, CEC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the NSW Department of Climate and Conservation (DECC) regarding the Sustainable Schools program.

15) Discussion with ACER regarding PISA

The Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA, tests the literacy and numeracy of 15 year olds across OECD countries every three years (2003, 2006, and 2009) and is the most comprehensive international student assessment program. The test results
have become a major focus of public commentary and the impetus for education policy development and learning in participating countries. In Australia, the OECD has engaged the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to run PISA. On 11 March 2008, a comprehensive briefing on PISA was given by John Ainley, Deputy Director and Chris Freeman, Research Director System-wide Testing, ACER, to members of the CEC Secretariat, the CEC Assessment and Reference Reporting Group and CCSP. In the pursuant discussion, there was particular interest in the comparisons of test results for 15 year olds between the different Australian States and Territories. Australia has always performed well in cross-country comparisons.

16) RSL and Schools Remember Anzac

On 10 April 2008, the annual RSL and Schools Remember Anzac Ceremony were held at the War Memorial in Hyde Park, Sydney. Schools from the three metropolitan dioceses were invited to participate and nominate students for key roles. The roles are rotated among the three major school education sectors each year.

This year, Catholic schools provided the Australian Army Cadet Honour Guard (Waverley College), flag orderlies, seating monitors, wreath handlers, the student speaker and the student who delivered the Prayer for Peace. Mr. Bill Walsh represented the Commission at the Ceremony. Mr. Tony McArthur represents Catholic schools on the Organising Committee.

17) Consultation with CLRI

The most recent consultation with CLRI was held on 28 March 2008. The majority of the discussion focused on the National Assessment Program 2008, Commonwealth funded Trade Training Centres in Schools, and the Digital Revolution implementation plans and progress. Other items touched on, included the NSW school leaving age, transition arrangements for the NSW Interest Subsidy Scheme, Commonwealth funding and the SES review and implementation of the “Not for Profit” Legislation.

18) Visit from Executive Secretary, Catholic Education, Uganda

On 18 March, Fr Albert Byaruhanga visited the Secretariat and met with Dr. Brian Croke and Messrs. Ian Baker and Bill Walsh. Fr Albert’s principal role in his home country of Uganda is Executive Secretary for Catholic Education. In addition, he is an advisor to the President and Chairman of the Council of the Mountains of the Moon University. Fr Albert is also heavily involved in projects to increase the awareness of and reduce the rate of infection of HIV/AIDS in his country.

Fr Albert’s visit to Australia is privately sponsored, primarily as a holiday, to which he added a series of meetings in Sydney and Melbourne. There may be future opportunities for Australian Catholic schools to provide some tangible support for Catholic schools in Uganda.
19) National Curriculum Board

The Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations on 15 April 2008 announced interim appointments to the National Curriculum Board. Dr. Brian Croke, Mr. Gary Le Duff and Professor Marie Emmitt were the non government appointees to the Board.

20) 2020 Summit

Mons. Tom Doyle, Mr. Matt Foley and Professor Greg Craven, all NCEC members, have been invited to attend the 2020 summit in Canberra scheduled for 19 and 20 April 2008.

John Kitney
Secretary to the Commission
1 May 2008