CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION, NEW SOUTH WALES

TWO HUNDRED AND NINETY-SIXTH MEETING

21 May 2008

SUMMARY REPORT

The 296th meeting of the Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales was held on 21 May 2008 in the Taylor/Barlow Rooms, Polding Centre, Level 8, 133 Liverpool Street Sydney. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Kristin Johnston rsj.

A Summary Report of the Commission meeting is provided below:

1) CEC Charter

Following their consideration of the 2005 review of the CEC, the NSW Bishops requested the Commission to recommend a new Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales (CEC) Charter to incorporate a number of governance changes. The Draft considered by the Commission at this meeting included updated governance arrangements, delegations, a clarification of relationships and a clear articulation of boundaries of authorities. Commissioners requested some amendments regarding meetings procedures, quora, and some terminology and have recommended adoption of the Draft Charter by the NSW Bishops at their 5 June 2008 meeting.

2) 2009 Quadrennium Distribution of Recurrent Grants

The new quadrennium commences on 1 January 2009. The NSW Bishops prior to each quadrennium decide on the formula for the distribution, to the eleven NSW Diocesan Catholic Education Offices, of Commonwealth and NSW government recurrent grants for the Catholic systemic schools in New South Wales. Catholic Education Offices then decide on allocations to individual Catholic systemic schools in their diocese.

When deciding on the 2005 to 2008 quadrennium formula, the NSW Bishops requested the Commission to recommend a new formula for the following quadrennium that was more equitable than per capita and to explore inter-diocesan sharing of resources. The Commission considered a number of options including elements based upon ABS census data, location and School size and special needs of individual students. The agreed formula for the 2009 to 2012 quadrennium represents a substantial shift of recurrent grants from City dioceses to regional dioceses and has been recommended to the NSW Bishops meeting scheduled for 5 June 2008. The Commission has also requested its Resources Policy Committee to commence planning for the 2013 to 2016 quadrennium to allow time to explore further equity based refinements of the new formula.

3) Federal Budget: Outcomes For Schools

The Federal Budget for 2008/09 was brought down on 13 May 2008. The Budget had no funding surprises for non-government schools, confirmed the present funding levels for recurrent and capital programs, and “re-announced” the major initiatives signalled in election promises and other announcements since the Government has come to office.
Commissioners discussed the various elements of the 2008 Federal budget and opportunities available to the Catholic education sector. The Commission noted that details of how the Early Childhood Initiative would be managed are not yet clear. The Commission also noted progress made in implementation of the Computers in Secondary Schools Program and of the Trade Training Centre program and that the Shared Facilities Program has been deferred.

4) Peer Abuse Project

The CEC’s working group has been developing guidelines on Inappropriate Student Sexual Behaviours Care and Protection Guidelines: responding to children and young people who exhibit age inappropriate sexual behaviours. Commissioners considered a progress report at this meeting.

Commissioners reviewed implementation options and agreed that the CEC should be involved in delivering the implementation package – firstly in delivering the ‘Train the Trainer’ module and then developing an on-line and interactive module for the dioceses and individual Catholic schools to allow them to adapt the material to their specific needs.

Commissioners agreed that this program is a significant priority for Catholic schools and implementation needs to be comprehensive and consistently delivered across all Catholic schools. Commissioners noted that the project is on schedule and the working group plans to present the guidelines and implementation strategies to the Commission later in 2008.

5) Student Wellbeing Framework

Commissioners considered a progress report from the Student Wellbeing Working Group. Separately, DEEWR has undertaken a scoping study to explore the development of an overarching National Student Wellbeing Framework that embeds student wellbeing in each school’s curriculum. CEC staff are participating in that initiative.

The CEC Working Party is exploring sustainable practices to assist schools to build capacity. This Working Party is also developing recommendations, for consideration by the Commission, for inter-diocesan co-operation to support the delivery of Student Wellbeing programs in Catholic schools.

Commissioners agreed that the development of inter-diocesan cooperation and protocols are important. However, some dioceses cannot recruit counsellors, particularly in some rural areas.

The final report including protocols will be presented to the Commission later in 2008.

6) Aboriginal Education Projects

Commissioners considered progress achieved with the CEC Aboriginal education projects. Commissioners noted the additional research required to map adequately the home addresses of Aboriginal students being schooled away from home. Commissioners also noted that planning for the Retention at School project has taken longer than first estimated. Commissioners regard these projects as high priorities. Commissioners noted that the final report on Aboriginal Students being Schooled Away from Home will be presented to the Commission later in 2008. The Retention of Aboriginal Students In School report is scheduled to go to DEEWR in December 2008.
7) Early Childhood Education initiative

Commissioners noted that DEEWR staff has been briefing educationists, including CEC, on kindergarten screening and the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) and how the Australian government’s seven early childhood election commitments will be implemented. The national roll-out of screening for five year olds is intended to identify communities where there is a high need for school readiness programs. The AEDI data may be used by the Australian government to locate the promised 260 new child care and early learning centres.

Commissioners noted that the national screening will cover questions such as physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication and general knowledge. These are tests that cover the development of children up to their commencement of formal schooling.

Commissioners expressed concern about the practical running of the screening tests. Training of existing kindergarten teachers will be required. It may not be practical for all kindergarten teachers to receive the necessary training initially. It would be more efficient for some teachers to be released and for them to undertake the testing of kindergarten students as a specialist over several small schools.

Commissioners agreed that the CEC Secretariat would seek further advice from DEEWR on the role of School Authorities in AEDI implementation and possible funding for teacher relief and report to the Commission when appropriate.

8) National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

Commissioners considered a progress report on the national testing of students, which took place on 13 to 15 May 2008. Approximately 80,000 students in Catholic schools in New South Wales participated in the tests.

Reporting to parents is scheduled for September 2008. School and National reports are due in December 2008. Beyond reporting is the possible use of test data for resource allocation.

Commissioners have taken the view that NAP data in its present form should be not used for determining the allocation of Commonwealth resources to schools and systems. The NCEC has put this position to DEEWR.

Commissioners have asked CEC’s Education Policy Committee to monitor the collation and reporting of NAP data and implications for future funding.

9) NSW Anti Discrimination Legislative Amendments

The NSW Government on 7 May 2008 introduced to State Parliament the “Miscellaneous Acts Amendment (Same Sex Relationships) Bill 2008”. Consequently, CEC, together with other Catholic agencies, has sought to clarify with the Attorney-General’s Office about how the Bill may impact on Catholic agencies.

CEC, together with CCER, monitors developments involving Anti-Discrimination legislation, which have the potential to impact on School employment practices, School enrolment practices and Teaching and Learning content. CEC has been assured that it is not the State Government’s intention to reduce religious freedom through their proposed amendments to Anti-Discrimination legislation.
Commissioners are also aware that the Australian Attorney General is undertaking a similar review to that of the NSW Attorney General. This review may also raise issues for Catholic education as also may the outcome of the current Wesley Mission test case on employment practices.

10) NSW Public Inquiries

Inquiry into 9 to 14 Year Olds

The CEC and CSSA have recently lodged their submission to the Tebbutt Inquiry on 9 to 14 year Olds.

The submission identified groups in the community that are at risk. The submission calls for early identification and support but not just at School. Responsibility is seen as community wide. There is a need to have easily accessible, user friendly intervention services to provide support that enables both resilience to be built and the individual potential of these children and young people to be developed. Any action also needs to empower their families by deepening their appreciation of community values and responsibilities.

Inquiry into Child Protection

Previous meetings considered the CEC submission to the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection. The CEC has undertaken a survey across all Catholic schools to review the incidences of and responses to mandatory reporting to DoCS. Analysis of the data will shortly be finalised and a report forwarded to the Inquiry Secretariat.

11) Meeting with NCEC

The most recent meeting of the NCEC was held in Canberra on 17 April 2008. This was the final meeting for Ms. Joan Warhurst, Chief Executive Officer, who retired on 30 April 2008. Ms. Teresa Angelico, former Executive Director CEC Victoria, will be filling the role until a permanent appointment is made. The meeting focussed especially on the new Commonwealth Government’s education priorities, particularly early childhood and the digital revolution. There was also discussion of the report of the NCEC Students with Disabilities Workshop held on 3-4 March 2008. The CEC report on Sectoral Trends of Australian Schooling was discussed at the meeting.

12) NCEC: New Chair

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has announced the appointment of Mrs. Therese Temby to the position of Chair of the National Catholic Education Commission. Mrs. Temby succeeds Mgr. Tom Doyle who is retiring. She was Director of Catholic Education in Western Australia from 1992–2003 and long-serving member of the NCEC. She has remained actively involved in local education authorities and projects in Western Australia.
13) CCER Executive Director

Dr. Brian Croke and Mr. William Walsh, as well as several Commissioners, attended the farewell dinner in honour of Mr. Michael McDonald who has completed his role as Executive Director of CCER after 12 years. Tributes to Mr. McDonald acknowledged his close working relationships with all the Catholic agencies, including CEC. On 12 May 2008, Dr. Croke hosted a lunch for Mr. McDonald with the Directors of CEC to acknowledge the co-operative relationship that was fostered between the two agencies during his tenure. Mr. Anthony Farley, has been appointed to succeed Mr. McDonald.

14) ACU: Advancing Community Engagement

ACU’s recently established ‘Institute for Advancing Community Engagement’ is premised on there being a valuable role, based upon quality research and transparent, ethical and Gospel based principles, within Australia and internationally for a University voice contributing to the public policy discourse and decision making processes. On 16 May 2008, Directors met with Br. Jude Butcher cfc and Dr. Kristin Johnston rsj from the Centre to explore options for engaging ACU in the wider education and social agenda of Catholic schools and Australian education.

15) Education Amendment Bill 2008

In 2006, the Education Act 1990 was amended to require schools to exchange information in respect of any student seeking enrolment at another school whose behaviour may pose a risk to others. This set of amendments is known as the Part 5A amendment but it is not yet in force. Part 5A will only come into force once the necessary Implementation Guidelines have been approved by the Minister. CEC has recently been advised that consultations to finalise the guidelines will be held soon and that as a consequence the Part 5A requirements are expected to come into force by Term 4 2008.

16) National Curriculum Board

The National Curriculum Board met for the first time on 23 April 2008. The NSW Minister nominated Mr. Tom Alegounarias, Chief Executive, NSW Institute of Teachers. The Non-Government nominees include Dr. Brian Croke Executive Director of the CEC and Professor Marie Emmitt, Dean of Education, ACU. The Board plans to start consultations on the development of a national curriculum this year. The secretariat and governance arrangements for the National Curriculum Board will be established by 1 January 2009. It is intended that the national curriculum will be delivered in all jurisdictions from January 2011.

17) Road Safety Education

The Centre for Road Safety of the NSW RTA has advised the CEC that the current contract will be extended to 2009. The funding level will remain the same as 2008, which is $400,000.

John Kitney
Secretary to the Commission
5 June 2008