SUMMARY REPORT

The 298th meeting of the Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales was held on 20 August 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) Commission Governance Arrangements

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 NSW/ACT Bishops at their 5 June 2008 meeting approved a revised CEC Charter. The revised Charter includes updated governance arrangements, delegations to the Commission, clarifies relationships and clearly articulates boundaries of authorities. The revised Charter also gives wide authority to the Commission to:

- establish Committees and Working Parties, apart from those Core Committees, which are prescribed in the Charter;
- approve meetings procedures;
- approve Membership and Terms of Reference for all Committees and Working Parties, including Core Committees;
- articulate boundaries of authority between the Commission and the CEC Secretariat; and,
- approve delegations for the CEC Secretariat.

The Commission at its 18 June 2008 meeting approved Commission Meetings Procedures. At this meeting, the Commission approved its schedule of meetings for 2009, CEC Secretariat Delegations, Meetings Procedures for Committees and Working Parties and Terms of Reference for the following Core Committees:

- Audit and Risk management Committee;
- Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee;
- Education Policy Committee;
- Executive Committee; and,
- Resources Policy Committee.
2) Environmental Issues

The CEC signed an MOU on 30 January 2008 with the NSW Department of Climate and Conservation regarding the Sustainable Schools program. At its 19 March 2008 meeting, the Commission approved Terms of Reference for the Working Party on Environmental Issues and authorised the Executive Director and Chair of the Education Policy Committee to appoint members of the Working Party and an Executive Officer.

Commissioners considered a progress report from the Working Party at this meeting. Commissioners confirmed their collective view that protecting the environment is critical for the Catholic school sector in company with the general community. Commissioners opined that Catholic schools and Catholic Education Offices need to become more active in reducing their carbon footprint. It is not a matter of quick fixes. It is a total approach that is required. Commissioners agreed to authorise several forums over the balance of 2008 and into 2009 garnering the widest participation to obtain full commitment of school communities to positive change.

It is intended that strategies will be developed from these planned forums, which will be then be advised to the NSW/ACT Bishops.

3) Students Who Pose A Risk

The NSW Education Minister is finalising Guidelines For The Management Of health And Safety Risks Posed To Schools By A Student With A History Of Violent Behaviour. Through the Catholic Education and Social Welfare Co-ordinating Committee, the CEC Secretariat has been involved in confidential consultations on Guidelines drafting issues. CCER has also been involved given that this matter is largely a workplace safety issue.

Commissioners noted that the guidelines when issued by the NSW Education Minister will be mandatory in all schools. When approved, there will be briefing sessions for all schools. The Guidelines are likely to be finalised by mid October 2008.

4) NAPLAN – National Testing Years 3,5,7 and 9

Commissioners discussed an update confidential report on the 2008 NAPLAN results.

The 2008 NAPLAN results will be presented across ten bands, of which six are used for each age group. Commissioners noted that this presentation is superior to previous approaches as it allows more valid comparisons over time and across age groups.

Parent reports will be against national means, not by State or school. All reports will be released on 12 September 2008. Schools and dioceses will be able to download their results on that day. There will be no disaggregation of results by sector. Ministers will make major media announcements when releasing the reports and data.

There will be a media lockup prior to the release date. This process will allow journalists to be fully briefed prior to the release of reports and ministerial announcements. Catholic sector access to the media briefings is being negotiated.

A revised SMART analysis package will also be made available to schools and Catholic Education/Schools Offices.

On 11 August 2008, Deputy Prime Minister Gillard delivered an address at the ACER Research Conference in Brisbane:
http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/Gillard/Releases/AcerResearchConference.htm. She made a number of comments in her address and in media interviews regarding the data which should be available to the community in relation to student progress in their schooling. Her key observations included:

- Our state, national and international data confirm that we have a ‘long tail’ of educational under-achievement and underperformance is strongly related to social disadvantage.

- The Government wants:
  - nationally available data from across all education sectors;
  - school by school;
  - showing information about student populations (SES, Indigenous, disabilities, non-English speaking, refugees, new arrivals) and student attainment;
  - attainment measured by national testing, year 12 completions, retention;
  - this data supplemented by the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI).

- Nationally, attainment will be tracked with comparisons of like schools and excellent teaching and school leadership will be identified and shared.
  - Comparable school populations will go across school systems.
  - It will be a ‘rich performance reporting system’, not league tables.

- ‘We are in active discussions with … Catholic school systems … about bringing new resources to schools that do face disadvantage’.

- Government will ‘especially assist those schools that need it’ and direct ‘additional resources to places of need’.

- The government has a database with SES of non-government schools but doesn’t have the same information for government schools.

- The observation that schools which enrol kids from ‘advantaged homes’ do not need additional assistance or ‘new resources’.

- Government is talking with state/territory colleagues about a new National Partnership to develop a national system of accrediting excellent teachers.

The Deputy Prime Minister’s arguments have been generally well received by the media, e.g. SMH Editorial 13 August 2008. However, there are difficulties for the NSW government which currently maintains legislation preventing the release of student data. Catholic schools are obliged to comply with this NSW legislation.
5) Aboriginal Students Being Schooled Away From Home

Commissioners considered the report on Aboriginal Students Being Schooled Away From Home. The report provides valuable information on the issues facing both the students involved and their communities. Commissioners noted that this report is not a longitudinal study; however, it is comprehensive and provides a template for the CEC to prepare guidelines for issue to Catholic schools.

Commissioners noted the diverse needs of Aboriginal students, which arise from their specific circumstances including the level of community and family support they receive. Some of their challenges are also faced by other ethnic and cultural groups.

Commissioners were concerned about the impact of Schooling Away From Home on communities and on the student him/herself when visiting home during school breaks or returning following completion of their education. Commissioners do not wish to see Aboriginals stereotyped as all being in special need.

Aboriginal students need to be individually supported, based upon their particular circumstances as for other ethnic and cultural groups. This need applies to day students and boarders.

Commissioners requested the CEC Secretariat to take these additional matters into consideration when drafting guidelines for Catholic schools. Draft guidelines will be presented to the Commission prior to release to NSW Catholic schools.

6) Literacy And Numeracy Pilots for Low SES Communities

Commissioners noted the six proposals forwarded to DEEWR as pilot projects focusing on literacy and numeracy needs in low SES communities. These pilots will be part of a long term intervention strategy for low SES communities experiencing low literacy and numeracy outcomes. This is one of the six areas proposed for National Partnerships for 2009 – 2012.

Each pilot project will determine how SES is defined for the NSW Catholic Sector. DEEWR has requested details of how this is to done. MYCEETYA and COAG are being invited to adopt a two step test for identifying schools serving low SES communities.

7) National Partnerships

Commissioners noted new funding arrangements progressively being implemented by the Australian Government.

Currently, all schools are funded under the State Grants Act. Under proposed new arrangements, non government schools only will be funded through the Commonwealth Schools Assistance Bill. Targeted programs will be funded through Inter-Governmental Agreements and National Partnerships and this is where there will be funding opportunities for all schools. Government schools will be funded through Inter-Government Agreements and National Partnerships.

The new Australian Government has pledged that there will be not one less dollar for non government schools for the 2009 Quadrennium. Growth funding, however, needs to be negotiated through Partnership Agreements on a case by case basis.

8) Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) Update
Commissioners noted the progress report on kindergarten screening and the rollout of the AEDI. The rollout will occur in the period March to May 2009. Two AEDI coordinator positions based in DET will be shared across the three school sections, similar to the arrangements for An Even Start tuition.

Data arising cannot be used at individual student level. Teachers will receive a summary of each child’s data for validation. Schools will receive a report of aggregated student data. Systems will be able to access data at a community level.

Commissioners noted that its Education Policy Committee is reviewing the discussion paper arising from COAG’s release of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care Report. The Commission will receive a report from the Committee later in this calendar year.

In addition, the NSW Department of Community Services has established a review of the NSW Children’s Services Regulation 2004, which should be finalised by September 2009. There will be wide consultation across all sectors.

9) **Prior To Schooling Working Party**

Commissioners noted that some Catholic schools or dioceses have extensively researched Prior to Schooling opportunities and their implications. However, understanding of the agenda is not consistent across all NSW Catholic schools, dioceses or parishes. Commissioners believe that there is an opportunity to share knowledge and experience gained to date across schools and dioceses.

Given the urgency for Catholic schools and dioceses to apply for capital funding for preschool facilities, the Commission has approved the convening of a CEC Working Party to develop a policy on all aspects of Prior to Schooling, including legal and resourcing issues. The Working Party has also been given the mandate to prepare policy advice on this matter for the NSW/ACT Bishops.

11) **Catholic Block Grant Authority**

Commissioners received an update report on the work of the Catholic Block Grant Authority. The CBGA is now managing the following programs:

- National Secondary Schools Computer Fund;
- Trade Training Centres;
- Local Schools Working Together;
- Investing In Our Schools

Commissioners noted that funding application rounds are overlapping and that program guidelines being progressively amended by DEEWR, thus creating some administrative difficulties for the CBGA. However, Commissioners also noted that there were signs of improved cooperation with DEEWR.

Commissioners were pleased with the success of the Burwood proposal for a Trade Training Centre. Commissioners noted that DEEWR has debriefed the three unsuccessful NSW Catholic applicants, which should improve their success in Round One Phase Two. Commissioners also noted the likely provision of administrative support funding to assist both CEC and dioceses develop TTC funding applications.
The Commission noted that funds through the NSSCF are being disbursed on the basis of reimbursements of actual invoices. Advance notice of installation of computers needs to be given to DEEWR to allow Federal MPs the option of being present at an official school event.

The Commission requested the CBGA formally to advise diocesan offices and Congregational schools of the limited scope of the LSWT program and the management issues surrounding joint projects with government schools in order to avoid misplaced effort and unrealistic expectations.

The Commission also noted that IOSP accountabilities are due by 28 February 2009.

12) VET Strategic Issues

Commissioners noted that NSW Catholic school student participation in VET programs has increased from 4,258 to 10,265 over six years but now appears to be levelling off. Participation in vocational education is consistent with a number of official church documents developed since Vatican II. VET is now an “imperative” for Catholic secondary schools.

Commissioners noted that the CEC has a greater role in VET support than in any other curriculum area and VET administration relatively absorbs a substantial amount of CEC resources. This has occurred because no other curriculum area is quite as intricate as VET with its inherent complexities, including the multiplicity of statutory supervisory bodies each with its inherent accountability requirements. Lack of co-ordinated data on the quality of VET outcomes, including student destination data, means that no realistic cost/benefit analysis of Catholic school participation in VET can be undertaken and this needs to be addressed.

The Commission will consider a final VET Strategic Directions Statement at the September 2008 meeting.

13) Higher School Certificate

The Board of Studies constantly monitors both the HSC and School Certificate examinations. The Board has been reviewing HSC examination practices and the main issues identified are:

- the stress on students due to internal assessments;
- the increasing expectations of courses with externally marked projects; and,
- external examinations:
  - need to provide ten minutes reading and planning time;
  - provision of more “guidance” to students on the length of responses;
  - the introduction of machine marked questions into many courses; and,
  - a reduction of the number of options within questions.

The intention is to introduce changes for the 2010 HSC. A BOS background paper has been prepared. It has been recently posted on the Board’s website shortly.
two-month consultation period will be provided for comment. The CEC will ask
dioeceses and schools to forward their responses to both the Board and CEC so that
the Education Policy Committee can identify and support the views of Catholic
schools. A similar process is planned by the Board for the School Certificate but
no details are available yet.

14) Senate Charities Review

The Senate Economics Committee is conducting an Inquiry into the Disclosure
regimes for charities and not-for-profit organisations. The Inquiry addresses
issues from the 2001 Senate Inquiry and from concerns raised recently by Choice
magazine. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is coordinating responses
from Education and other Church agencies. A briefing paper has been prepared
by Catholic Health Australia. NCEC is finalising advice for the ACBC.

15) Catholic Students In WorldSkills National Finals

On 14 July 2008, the WorldSkills National Finals were conducted. Students from
NSW Catholic schools won the following awards in Vet:

Ryan Drake, ATC Manning Valley – Automotive Services – Silver Medal
Joel Clark, ATC Manning Valley – Automotive Services – Bronze
Penelope Collaros, Domremy College – Food & Beverage – Silver
John Maher, St Francis De Sales College Leeton – IT – Silver
Sean Mongey, All Saints Senior Catholic College – IT – Bronze
Brad Davidson, NSW ATC Port Macquarie – Metal & Engineering – Gold

Congratulations to the students and staff.

16) National Curriculum Board Forums

The next National Curriculum Board (NCB) consultation will take place on
15 September 2008, when the NCB will conduct a forum in Sydney, to be
facilitated by the NSW Board of Studies. Over 100 people will be invited from all
sectors to ensure that the diversity of school education in NSW can be properly
represented. The CEC Secretariat will co-ordinate NSW Catholic sector
participation in the 15 September 2008 NSW NCB forum.
17) Privacy Law Issues Update

In November 2007, CEC for NCEC and AIS for ISCA, following the advice of Lawyers Minter Ellison, commented on two key privacy law reform recommendations made by the Australian Law Reform Commission, as follows:

- repeal of the employee records exemption: and,
- new capacity for children over 15 years to “control” their “own” records held by schools.


18) Access to DET Safety in Schools Portal – TAS and VET

Three Catholic schools have recently been fined by WorkCover for breaches of OH&S in TAS/VET classes. WorkCover has advised the Diocese concerned that Catholic Schools should follow the guidelines available through DET’s VET in Schools Portal. Currently, this site is not accessible outside DET. In the past, Catholic schools and dioceses had access to printed material produced by DET Asset Management (the Blue Book and revised lists of prohibited equipment, produced in December 2003). As the online portal is now the source of OHS advice to DET Schools, it is necessary to negotiate access to the portal for Catholic school OHS managers. CEC has written to the Director-General DET to arrange access to this resource. CEC is also liaising with CCER on this issue.

19) Australian Catholic Education Network Consortium (ACENC)

Recently, dioceses and State and Territory commissions have been sent an update on the progress ACENC has made designing and negotiating the Catholic Network Australia (CNA). With the update is a proposal, based upon negotiations with Telstra, for an eight year access contract with data costs on a per site basis. There are also proposals for laying high speed optical wire fibre from network nodes to school sites. Responses from dioceses and Congregational schools are requested by 19 September 2008. A meeting, hosted by ACENC and to be attended by Diocesan Directors, senior staff, representatives of the Congregations and State and Territory Commissions, will be held in Melbourne on 30 September 2008 to discuss responses to the proposal. CEC is liaising with NCEC on this matter.

John Kitney
*Secretary to the Commission*
5 September 2008