Summary Report of the 370th Meeting

HELD THURSDAY 20 AUGUST 2015
TOOHEY ROOM, CATHOLIC SCHOOL OFFICE, 1/841 HUNTER STREET, NEWCASTLE

1. School Visits – 19 August 2015

Each year the Commission holds one of its monthly meetings in a Diocese. This year the Commission visited the Diocese of Maitland – Newcastle. On 19 August, Commissioners visited schools across the Diocese.

Commissioners expressed their thanks to Diocesan Director Ray Collins and the staff of Catholic Schools Office for their wonderful hospitality. Commissioners noted that there were great things happening in the Diocese and the school visits were a great learning experience for them. Principals demonstrated their passion and dedication while students were self-assured, confident and proud of their schools and interacted with visitors in a warm, friendly and respectful manner. Schools presented as loving, sharing, and confident Catholic communities.

2. VET Work Placement Coordinator Funding 2016: Issues for CEC

Work Placement requirements are a mandatory feature of HSC vocational education and training (VET) courses for secondary school students in NSW. Work Placement underpins the quality and industry recognition of VET as part of the Higher School Certificate.

The Catholic sector has been invited to participate in the 2016-2019 Work Placement Coordination Program but on the understanding that there is no targeted program funding available from either the State or Commonwealth Governments. The Catholic sector has approximately 13,500 students enrolled in HSC Industry Curriculum Framework VET courses that require a mandatory work placement in 2016. The Catholic sector share of Work Placement coordination costs to support these VET students is estimated at $1.7m for 2016.

With respect to the provision of work placements for Stage 5 and 6 VET students, Commissioners agree that this task is best coordinated and addressed on a cross-sectoral and state-wide basis. In this context, Commissioners agreed that the CEC Secretariat should finalise negotiations for the renewal of the Work Placements Service Provider Coordination Program for 2016. Commissioners agreed to meeting the $1.7m participation cost on condition that CECNSW be represented on the State Program Management Committee. It was noted that the CEC Secretariat VET State Coordinator, Gerard Delany, will manage this project.
3. **Review of Catholic Education in NSW – Discussion with Review Project Officer Kathryn Greiner**

The NSW Bishops’ review is now underway and all Commissioners are to be interviewed individually by Kathryn Greiner. The timetable for interviews is being co-ordinated by Tony Farley, Executive Director, CCER. To date, at Ms Greiner’s request, a detailed background briefing was assembled by the CECNSW Secretariat and presented to her as Project Officer earlier in August 2015. Some individual interviews have already been conducted.

Commissioners noted Kathryn Greiner’s presentation on her view of education for the future in which students are encouraged to learn, unlearn and relearn. Commissioners also noted that Ms Greiner believes in more connectivity between the school and the family. She also believes in improving teacher quality and holding educators accountable for their outputs. In addition, she stressed new demands for increased public accountability for the expenditure of government grants.

Following Ms Greiner’s presentation, the following key issues were discussed:

- Development of an overarching strategy for Catholic education across NSW for those attending Catholic schools and those who don’t and greater transparency;
- More than a restructure required – re-imagining, re-focusing, re-engaging required and a need to break down dysfunctional barriers and need to identify drivers of paradigm shifts;
- Need to make things easier for School Principals;
- Teaching Catholic as a prime objective and retention of the charism of religious orders;
- Identifying and overcoming key barriers to quality education;
- State wide capacity building;
- Reducing duplication and improving service delivery;
- Increased focus on teacher quality and retention including mentoring systems and high quality and equal access to teacher school professional development irrespective of location; and
- More community engagement and greater accountability.

In response to her invitation to identify barriers to change, responses included:

- Distance;
- Unequal capacity to deliver teacher development and student performance;
- Teacher quality/recruitment;
- Equity;
- Evangelisation;
- Getting on front foot with …;
- Unclear/ineffective decision making; and
- Improvement focus needs to be at local level.

An initial report of Review outcomes is to be provided to the NSW Bishops in December 2015.
4. **Strategic Socio-Demographic Presentation: Systems or Structures – Contexts for NSW Catholic Schooling**

At their 19 November 2014 meeting, Commissioners agreed on a strategic approach to socio-demographic analysis by the CECNSW Secretariat in the second half of 2015, including “A report to the Commission on a socio-demographic topic of importance to the Commission, in response to emerging socio-demographic issues or the Commission’s request for a report on particular strategic socio-demographic issues” (Paper 363/8.1/1).

The agreed 2015 socio-demographic presentation to the 20 August 2015 Commission meeting was prepared by Crichton Smith, Principal Research Officer, CEC NSW. The presentation examines a number of strategic socio-demographic trends in NSW Catholic education, and place these trends in broader contexts.

Commissioners agreed that important strategic thinking needs to occur to meet current challenges and population growth. In particular, the need to track both Kindergarten enrolments and student exit patterns before Year 12 were cited as matters requiring analysis. Commissioners noted that the Greiner Review will position the NSW Catholic Schools System to be more efficient for the purpose of identifying and meeting key demands.

5. **Commissioners’ Governance Workshop**

Following their 21 July 2015 meeting, Commissioners participated in a Workshop on School Governance requirements and issues arising. Input to the workshop was provided by solicitor Bill d’Apice.

Commissioners were reminded that three CECNSW Governance Workshops for Dioceses and Congregational Schools have been held: 27 February, 1 June and 12 August. Some 200 Catholic sector “Responsible Persons” have attended these training sessions. A further Workshop is planned for 23 November 2015.

Commissioners commented favourably on both the July 2015 Commissioners workshop and the 12 August 2015 “Responsible Persons” training day. Discussion focussed on the role of the Diocesan Trustees and the nature of the Diocesan Trust Corporation. The requirement for “Responsible Persons” training for both Trustees and Diocesan Directors was discussed. Commissioners endorsed the following list of ongoing governance compliance tasks:

- clarifying the role of Proprietor and Trustees;
- identifying Governing Bodies;
- writing delegations and preparing as to how they may be used by a Proprietor;
- clarifying the role of Parish Priest through delegations;
- clarifying the purposes of a Catholic School – a subjective test – in relation to the use of the income and assets of the school; and
- addressing cross-border issues, especially where a school’s Proprietor is located outside NSW.

6. **Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse: Schools Issues Paper**

Since 2013 CECNSW has been inputting to the work of the ‘Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse’ through both the National Catholic Education Commission and the Truth Justice and Healing Council.

On 6 August 2015, CECNSW received a formal TJHC request through NCEC to engage in the development of the Catholic sector response to the Royal Commission Issue Paper 9 ‘Addressing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Primary and Secondary Schools’. Responses to the Royal Commission are required by 31 August 2015.

Commissioners focused their comments on the need for the coordination of Catholic sector input, i.e. the need for ‘one voice’. With respect to the proposals for the National Regulation of Schooling, commissioners argued for a ‘Standards’ and ‘Harmonisation’ approach utilising existing state-based School Regulators such as BOSTES and the Ombudsman. In this context the existing School Registration requirements in respect of ‘Safe and Supportive Environment’ were noted.
7. **Australian Government Online Safety Program: Grant Allocation Process**

The Commonwealth Government has launched an initiative to promote online safety in schools. It aims to deliver online safety programs in schools procured from providers that have been certified, approved or recognised by the Children’s e-Safety Commissioner. Online safety programs include online safety education programs, online safety frameworks and online safety professional development.

Education authorities are responsible for achieving minimum performance targets, formulating criteria to identify less resourced schools and/or schools with identified online safety issues in their respective jurisdictions, and the 39 NSW Catholic Sector schools that must be selected to participate in this project in accordance with the minimum performance targets.

Commissioners requested the CECNSW Secretariat to develop an implementation plan focussing program effort in 3 dioceses over the 3 year life of the program, but still addressing 39 schools per year.

8. **Commission Decisions**

The Commission endorsed:

a) the CECNSW submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in NSW as attached to this Paper and

b) the CECNSW Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools Program 2014 accountability report.

9. **Meeting with NSW Minister for Education**

The Chair, Bishop Comensoli and Executive Director, Brian Croke, met with the Minister for Education and Training, Adrian Piccoli, on 11 August. It was the first formal opportunity for the Minister to meet with the new Chair of the CECNSW. The meeting focussed mainly on procedural matters but Bishop Comensoli was able to explain to the Minister the background and nature of the Bishops review of Catholic education in NSW. Issues raised by the Minister which he sees as germane to the Review are: (1) inconsistency in the application of industrial agreements across Catholic schools (e.g. dealing with under-performing teachers); (2) disparities in student performance across NSW Catholic schools (why NAPLAN results in some parts of NSW are consistently higher than elsewhere); (3) lack of transparency in State recurrent funding at school level (i.e. NSW Government seeking more clarity on how its funds are allocated across schools); (4) improving capacity for Government/Catholic schools to work together in more remote areas.

10. **Fire Prevention for Schools: Hawkesbury Road Project II**

In March 2013, in response to expectations of the Rural Fire Service (RFS) that principals take responsibility for decisions to close or evacuate schools, CECNSW conducted a workshop at Winmalee Rural Fire Brigade. The workshop, known as the Hawkesbury Road Project (HRP), was a proof of a concept for assisting school leaders to understand and respond appropriately to a bushfire emergency. In October 2013 the Linksview Fire destroyed 2,018 homes. Two of the schools which participated in the HRP, St Columba’s Catholic College and St Thomas Aquinas Primary School, were directly impacted by the fire. At the After Action Review in November 2013, they indicated that the HRP assisted them substantially in their preparations.

The principals of St Columba’s and St Thomas Aquinas requested CECNSW that the HRP be conducted again. Supported by CECNSW, HRP II will be conducted by Winmalee Rural Fire Brigade at Winmalee High School on 28 August 2015. This time NSW government schools will also participate. HRP II will use the same methodology as before but will focus more sharply on understanding the role of emergency services. School leaders will have the opportunity to review their current emergency management plans in light of the information provided and to identify key decision points and sources of information. Ultimately, CECNSW would like the HRP process to be adopted more widely and using an “all hazards” approach, provide a means of preparing all schools and principals for emergency situations.
11. Dealing with ‘Extremism’ in Schools

In response to NSW government concerns arising from an incident in a government school, on 30 July CECNSW wrote to the Diocesan Directors of Broken Bay, Maitland-Newcastle, Parramatta, Wollongong and Sydney, attaching the advice to principals from the Department of Education Deputy Secretary Greg Prior and the NSW Police Force. The Diocesan Directors were asked to ensure that principals were vigilant and that they reported to police if they believe an offence which impact on the safety of their or another schools community may be, or had been, committed. More recently Memo 160/15 requested data to be provided to the Commonwealth on strategies to deal with students at risk of radicalisation had been preaching extremist violence: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-28/nsw-govt-introduces-new-measures-to-combat-schoolyard-extremism/6652304. Catholic schools take very seriously both the obligation to provide a safe, secure environment for students and staff and the development of civic responsibility in students.

On 5 August, Ian Baker and Jim Hanna attended a briefing on extremism provide by NSW Police.

The key concern in relation to allegations of extremism is the “willingness to use violence or support for the use of violence by others”. The motivation which supports such a willingness is not the focus of concern which is on the violence or threat of violence, both of which are covered by the NSW Crimes Act. Also the Memorandum of Understanding for Information Exchange between Schools and NSW Police 2011 includes a requirement to contact police in the case of concerns that a criminal act may be about to be committed which would impact on the safety of a school’s students and/or staff. Incitement to such acts is addressed by both the NSW Crimes Act and the Commonwealth Crimes Act. While it is unlikely, though not impossible, that the events reported could occur in a Catholic school, it is not inconceivable that Catholic school students might become involved in community disputes.

12. Education and Leadership Symposium, Switzerland, September 2015

CECNSW was asked (at short notice) to provide a teacher representative of the Catholic sector to join with representatives from the government and independent school sectors to accompany the Secretary, Department of Education and Communities (Dr Michele Bruniges) to a conference in Switzerland next month (http://www.educationsymposium.net/en/). Dr Bruniges will be speaking on Making Local Decisions: Perspectives from the Coalface. The CECNSW representative has been asked to speak for 15 minutes and participate in panel discussions with a focus on the importance of induction and mentoring of beginning teachers, linked to teacher standards, drawing on their school’s support strategies in this area. Mrs Kaylene Costello from St Michael’s Primary school, Thirroul, has been selected as the most suitable person from the Catholic sector. She comes highly recommended for her knowledge of and ‘on the ground’ skills in inducting beginning teachers and mentoring them into the profession. She has recently acquired accreditation at the Highly Accomplished Level (the first in the Diocese of Wollongong). She is an articulate presenter and aware of her responsibility to speak for all NSW teachers in this vital area of our profession.


An Expert Working Group for K-6 Mathematics has been formed by BoSTES to assist in the evaluation of K-6 Mathematics units in initial teacher education programs. The CECNSW nominee is Christine Mae who is a Mathematics Leader of Learning (previously known as Adviser) in the Southern Region, Catholic Education Office Sydney.

John Kitney
Commission Secretary
3 September 2015