Summary Report of the 374th Meeting

WEDNESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2016
CLANCY/GILROY ROOMS, LEVEL 5, POLDING CENTRE, SYDNEY

1. Vatican World Congress November 2015 “Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion”: Key Themes and Outcomes

In November 2015 in Rome three conferences were held: (1) the Vatican World Congress, the one CECNSW had prepared for in advance and for which most Commissioners attending were enrolled, but this was strictly divided into two separate sections (School, Universities); (2) the meeting of the International Organisation for Catholic Education which had two Australians on its program, namely a keynote presentation from Greg Whitby (Parramatta) and a panel participation from Steven Elder (Melbourne), and (3) the jurists of the European Association for Education Law and Policy. Further, some religious congregations took the opportunity to offer their own mini-conferences on the side. On the final day (Saturday 21 November 2015) they all came together in the Vatican’s Paul VI Audience Hall for the plenary session with Pope Francis.

Most of the issues raised will also be fundamental to the ongoing deliberations of the CECNSW Mission and Identity Working Party which reports to the Education Policy Committee. While they may take account of all the various themes and exhortations in Pope Francis’ contribution they will start by focussing, in this Year of Mercy, on how the Church’s works of mercy can be translated into the current agenda and priorities for NSW Catholic schools. It is already clear that a systematic approach to the ‘corporal works of mercy (e.g. feed the hungry)’ and the ‘spiritual works of mercy (e.g. comfort the afflicted) is something of practical value to schools and students.

2. Closing the Gap for Aboriginal Students: Update

Commissioners considered a high-level overview of key Aboriginal Education developments since the Commission’s engagement with these issues during 2015, noting that the Australian and NSW Governments are finalising an Accountability Framework in respect of the expectations of Aboriginal students recurrent funding generated under the provisions of the Australian Education Act, that is, the ‘Closing the Gap’ bilateral agreement for NSW.

Discussion focussed on:

• the Catholic schools’ NAPLAN performance gap evident in the tabled analysis;
• the needs of rural schools with high Aboriginal enrolments, including the requirement for suitable teacher housing for remote schools;
• concerns about the impact of the Commission’s Aboriginal loading funding formula on schools with high density Aboriginal enrolments; and
• the need to finalise the Commission’s attendance case studies.
3. Governance and Not-for-Profit

At their 21 October 2015 meeting, Commissioners considered a paper on ‘CECNSW Governance Responsible Person Training for 2016: Project outline and budget.’ Subsequently the 18 November 2015 meeting considered ‘Section 83C Not-For-Profit Guidelines: Implementation Actions’.

Commissioners noted that Governance and Not-for-Profit requirements are highly related and interdependent compliance requirements which need to be progressed as complementary activities.

Commissioners focussed their discussion on:

- the identification of Responsible Persons by school proprietors;
- the role of school/diocesan ‘Advisory Boards’, noting that each school/system is required to identify a ‘Governing Body’; and
- how related party transactions involving church agencies should be identified and managed.

In this context, Commissioners noted the relevance of the developing CECNSW online Governance training modules to an understanding of Not-for-Profit issues which will be available to Responsible Persons from 1 March 2016.

Finally, Commissioners were reminded that all BOSTES and NSW Education Act Governance and Not-for-Profit compliance requirements are now ‘live’. That is, both Sections 47 and 83C provisions have been in operation since the commencement of the 2015 school year. All Australian Education Act compliance requirements have been in place since January 2014.

4. Australian Schools Plus: Charity Funding for low SES Schools

Australian Schools Plus (Schools Plus) [https://www.schoolsplus.org.au/] was established in 2013 in response to Recommendation 41 (“Philanthropy”) of David Gonski’s Review of School Funding. The recommendation called for a new body to encourage greater philanthropy to schools in low socio-economic areas and to build the capacity of these schools to develop their own relationships with donors.

Schools Plus connects low SES schools (schools with an ICSEA of less than 1000) with donors. It was created after discussions between philanthropists, the not-for-profit sector and government representatives. The Australian Government provided seed funding and Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status in March 2015.

The organisation’s primary objective is to support schools with a value on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of less than 1000. It was noted that local Parents and Friends Associations serving low ICSEA schools should be informed of this school funding option.

Its DGR status enables - for the first time - donations made through Schools Plus for general educational purposes to be tax deductible.

5. Annual Schools Census: CECNSW Reform Priorities and Process

Commissioners supported the proposal that CECNSW undertake the process of re-engineering work necessary to establish the precise scope and nature of potential improvements to the August census data collection process and, if feasible, to implement this for the 2016 year. This proposal seeks the cooperation of dioceses for CECNSW to examine and if appropriate implement the re-engineering of the process for collecting the August 2016 census data with the aim of improving the efficiency and reducing the time and effort required of school, diocesan and CEC personnel.
6. **Commission Decisions**

The Commission:

1) endorsed the 2015-2016 Funding Agreement between the NSW Government and CECNSW for Before and After School Care Funds;

2) noted that the eligibility criteria for NSW Before and After School Care Funds have been amended in 2016 and that grants will be available to schools to establish or expand before and after school services;

3) endorsed and adopted the renewed MOU for the centralised reporting by school principals of students at risk of significant harm to FACS.

4) endorsed the terms and conditions of renewal of insurance cover for students undertaking work placement and work experience;

5) noted the requirements for confirmation of participation in the employer liability cover purchased by CECNSW on behalf of Dioceses and schools; and

6) noted that the relevant renewed advice has been sent to Diocesan Directors and Principals of Congregational schools.

7. **NSW Parliament’s Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children and Young People**

Problematic sexualisation behaviours in Primary schools are a growing issue of concern to schools and parents. The NSW Parliament has set up an inquiry and the Catholic Education and Social Services Co-ordinating Committee is currently finalising an engagement strategy with respect to the Inquiry. CECNSW Secretariat officers are in liaison with CCSP and the Sydney Archdiocesan Life, Marriage and Family Centre. A copy of the final submission will be tabled at the March 2016 Commission meeting. Following acceptance of submissions the Inquiry will hold a number of public hearings. CECNSW may become involved in the public hearings process. CCSP is also providing a submission to the Inquiry.

John Kitney  
Commission Secretary  
25 February 2016