

# Catholic Schools in Victoria: Investing in our future

*Submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References  
Committee Inquiry into Teaching and Learning (maximising our investment in Australian schools)*



**The Catholic school pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth to the same degree as any other school. What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love.**

Declaration of Christian Education: *Gravissimum Educationis*.  
Second Vatican Council document proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965.

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*in reply please quote:*

16 November 2012

Dear Committee Secretary

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) represents 486 Victorian schools, over 197,000 students and 18,000 full time equivalent staff. Our schools are within the four Catholic Dioceses in Victoria being the Melbourne Archdiocese and the Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst Dioceses.

We welcome the opportunity to present a submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Inquiry into Teaching and Learning (maximising our investment in Australian schools).

We are conscious that there is much uncertainty about the future of education funding in Australia. We take this opportunity to highlight our three core principles for the funding of Catholic schools:

- Additional funding to Catholic schools is needed to close the resources gap between Catholic schools and government schools.
- Government funding must keep pace with the cost of educating a child in a government school.
- Fair funding for students with disability and special needs is essential, so that all students, regardless of the school they attend, receive funding to meet their needs.

The success of Catholic education in Victoria may be attributed to the following five elements: good leaders, good teachers, effective school/family partnerships, school subsidiarity and school/system collaboration. The coming together of these five elements is critical for school improvement.

This submission addresses the abovementioned areas in order to demonstrate that the Catholic school sector in Victoria provides high quality education. This submission also demonstrates that we are well equipped to continue providing a quality education.

I would welcome the opportunity to personally address the Committee on any matters raised in this submission.

Catholic education in Victoria has a good story to tell. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to share it with you.

Good wishes

Stephen Elder  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## ***Introduction: Who we are, what we do and why we do it***

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Archbishop Denis Hart outlined the practical purpose of Catholic education in his Pastoral Letter on the Catholic Church in Education:

Catholic schooling is the meeting place of culture and the gospel. The school constructs a critical dialogue between culture and the gospel. The lives of staff, students and families explore the world in which they live in the light of the gospel. Our life can be based upon reason and faith. Catholic schooling provides a “light to the world”.<sup>1</sup>

In 1997 the Congregation for Catholic Education (a ‘department’, with specific responsibility for education, within The Roman Curia of the Catholic Church) published a document which addressed *The Catholic schools on the threshold of the Third Millennium*.<sup>2</sup> This document describes the fundamental characteristics of a Catholic school as a place that integrates the education of the human person with a clear educational project for which Christ is the foundation; an experience of the mission of education as a work of love; a service to society and part of the evangelising mission of the Church.

It highlights the essential qualities of the Catholic school as:

- a school for all, with special attention to those who are weakest (n 15)
- a school for the human person and of human persons (n 9)
- at once a place ‘of evangelisation, of complete formation, of enculturation, of apprenticeship in a lively dialogue between young people of different religions and social backgrounds’ (n 11)
- at the service of society, taking the new cultural situation in her stride (n 16)

Further, the Code of Canon Law outlines that:

“Education must pay regard to the formation of the whole person, so that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society. Children and young persons are therefore to be cared for in such a way that their physical, moral and intellectual talents may develop in a harmonious manner, so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom, and be formed to take an active part in social life.”<sup>3</sup>

Catholic education achieves the above mentioned by integrating faith, life and culture. We invite students to discover God’s presence in their daily lives by engaging them in a dialogue between their life experiences and Catholic teaching. In this way our students are invited and encouraged to grow in understanding of themselves and their world in light of the Gospel and be empowered to take responsibility for themselves and for creating a just society.

The preamble to the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) Constitution states:

“The CECV is established by the Bishops of Victoria to assist them to meet their responsibilities under Church laws in providing Catholic education in Catholic schools in Victoria and to ensure the proper governance of, and provide leadership in, Catholic education across the State of Victoria.

It is acknowledged that the operation and governance of Catholic Schools rests with the local authority and is subject to oversight by a Bishop of schools in his Diocese.

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<sup>1</sup>(Hart, 2011)

<sup>2</sup>(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997)

<sup>3</sup>(The Holy See, 1998)

The CECV is an integral part of the Church's mission of Catholic education and has a strategic role in ensuring that Catholic Schools are of high quality, committed to continually improving their effectiveness in both academic pursuits and in the preservation and enhancement of the distinctive identity and character of Catholic schools.

The CECV exists as a representative body and provides leadership, coordination and representation of Catholic education in Victoria through a range of services to providers of Catholic education in each Diocese and to the local communities.”<sup>4</sup>

Together with the CECV, Catholic Education Offices in Victoria<sup>5</sup> have formulated a range of policies, procedures and practices. Examples in this submission will mainly be drawn from the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM).

We are proud that Catholic schools in Victoria build on the traditions and strengths of over 170 years of Catholic education in our state.

There are 486 Catholic schools in Victoria with over 197,000 students who are supported by 18,000 full time equivalent staff.

Catholic schools in Victoria educate more than one-in-five Victorian students. CECV is the sixth largest schooling system in Australia.

We are pleased that between 2011 and 2012 the total enrolment in Victorian Catholic schools increased by 3,757 students. This is 36% of the new enrolments in all Victorian schools, which is considerably above our overall enrolment share of 23 per cent. Much of this success must be attributed to the community leadership of our Parish Priests and Principals.

It is important that the Australian government understands and respects the distinctive character of Catholic education. A combination of good leaders, good teachers, effective school/family partnerships, school subsidiarity and school/system collaboration in the context of a faith filled community is what makes Catholic education unique. This strong platform enables Catholic education to achieve and contribute to education in a unique way. From our experience, we know that the coming together of these five elements is critical for school improvement.

As part of its mission, Catholic schools play an important part in some of Victoria's most disadvantaged communities. More and more families with Indigenous, low-income or refugee backgrounds, or those with children with disabilities, choose to send their children to a Catholic school. Unfortunately, Government funding for students with special needs in Catholic schools often falls short of what is required. If these students were enrolled in government schools, they would receive more funding to support their needs.

*The Catholic schools on the threshold of the Third Millennium* reaffirmed the commitment of Catholic education to serving the poor and vulnerable:

“...the Catholic school... is a school for all, with special attention to those who are weakest. In the past, the establishment of the majority of Catholic educational institutions has responded to the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged. It is no novelty to affirm that Catholic schools have their origin in a deep concern for the education of children and young people left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling. In many parts of the world even today material poverty prevents many youths and children from having access to formal education and adequate human and Christian formation.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>(Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Limited, 2012)

<sup>5</sup>Encompassing Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst Diocese

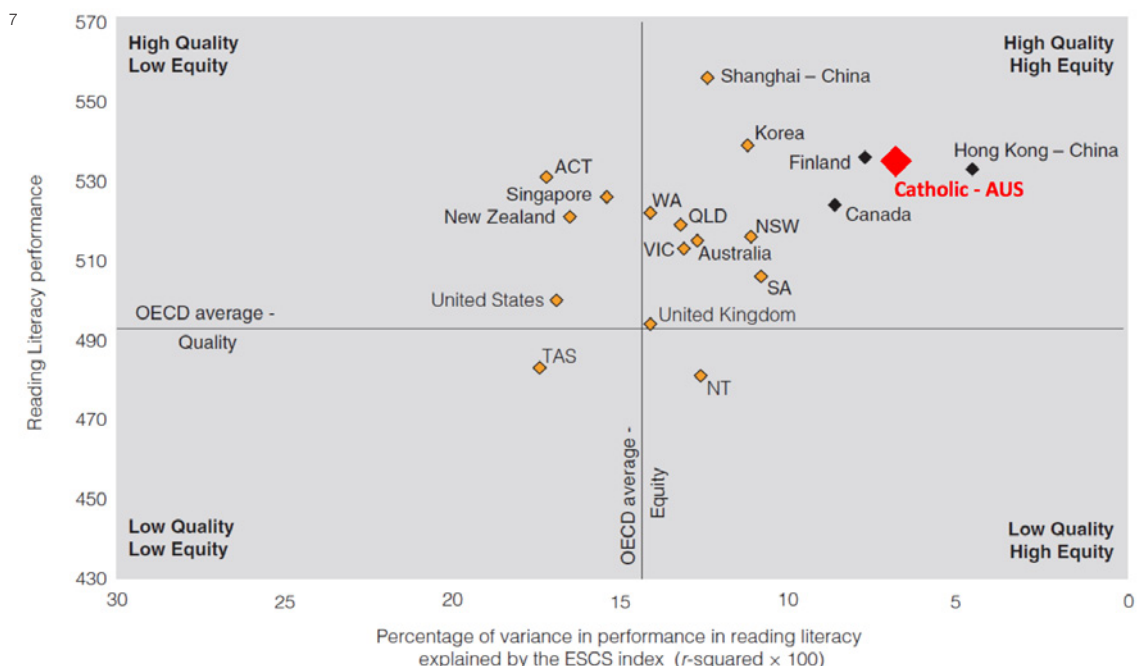
<sup>6</sup>(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997)

An analysis by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) of the 2009 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data shows that Catholic schools are able to overcome, to a large extent, student socio-economic barriers to schooling success, and produce learning outcomes that are both *High Quality* and *High Equity* when measured against the international sample data.

The PISA data for 2009 provide recent evidence of the Catholic school sector's high education outcomes in terms of performance and equity. The graph below illustrates the relationship between equity (the strength of the social gradient) and mean reading literacy for a sample of countries that participated in PISA 2009 and Australian States and Territories. It also includes an average score for the sample of Catholic schools in Australia, obtained from the ACER.

There were 3,098 students in 73 Australian Catholic schools in the PISA 2009 survey which is a sample size close to the total sample size of most participating countries. The Catholic school sample is 22% of the total Australian sample. The 2009 sample of Catholic schools, along with the overall Australian sample, is statistically valid and representative of the population.

The key aspect to note about the performance of Catholic schools in Australia is that their score on *equity* is significantly above the Australian average. This means that economic, social and cultural status has less influence on student performance in Catholic schools than generally in schools across Australia (or in any individual State or Territory). In fact, the graph below shows that the equity of outcomes achieved in Catholic schools in Australia exceeds Finland, which is widely regarded by many groups as the international benchmark on *equity*.



<sup>7</sup>(Thomson, 2010) The horizontal axis represents the strength of the relationship between socio-economic background and performance, used as a proxy for equity in the distribution of learning opportunities. Mean performance in reading literacy is plotted on the vertical axis, with the line at 493 representing the OECD mean.

We note that successive Governments have never funded students with special needs in Catholic schools to the same level as they do in government schools. As part of their social justice mission, our school communities welcome these students; despite the much smaller amount of funding they receive to support them.

On average, Catholic school students, receive 20 per cent less government funding than government school students. To make up the difference, Catholic schools collect fees. Even then, on average Catholic schools operate at around 90 per cent of the cost of educating a student in a government schools.

When all of the above is considered, the key points are that:

- Catholic education has learnt much in the more than 170 years that our schools have been operating.
- Current government funding arrangements mean that Catholic schools operate with less funding than government schools.
- Although this is the case, Catholic education is proud of all that has been achieved and notes that we continue to perform strongly in many domains.

Drawing on its knowledge and expertise as a significant education system, the CECV is therefore well placed to make this submission about maximising the investment in Australian schools.



## **Part 1: At the heart of education – Learning and Teaching**

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The Second Vatican Council Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*) sets the stage for the vital place of the school in creating an environment for learning and teaching:

“Among all educational instruments the school has a special importance. It is designed not only to develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, to prepare for professional life. Between pupils of different talents and backgrounds it promotes friendly relations and fosters a spirit of mutual understanding. It establishes a centre whose work and progress must be shared together by families, teachers, associations of various types that foster cultural, civic, and religious life, as well as by civil society and the entire human community.”<sup>8</sup>

Today, our schools are very aware of creating a contemporary learning approach that is personalised, responds to learning needs, interests and the experiences of each student. Contemporary learning aims to empower students with the knowledge, skills and capacities to respond creatively to the challenges of their world. It provides rigorous, relevant and purposeful learning opportunities, supported by explicit teaching.<sup>9</sup>

Our goal is to enable every young person to be a successful, engaged and purposeful learner, with the confidence to embrace opportunity; equipped with the skills to take responsibility for themselves and their life. We aspire for every student to be empowered as a lifelong learner, able to adapt to the challenges of a rapidly changing world and to commit to authentic action for justice and the common good.<sup>10</sup>

To support this goal, we aim to plan and provide safe, contemporary and effective learning environments, where students feel comfortable, accepted and motivated to learn and explore. Contemporary learning requires high-quality teaching. We therefore aim to attract, develop and retain the very best teachers and staff, ensuring all staff have a high level of knowledge and skills and employ a suite of contemporary, evidence-based teaching strategies.<sup>11</sup>

### **Professional Learning**

The Catholic Church emphasises the need for well educated and dedicated staff in our schools, whose contribution to the life of a Catholic school gives witness to the values of the Gospel and the mission of the Church. We recognise that educational leaders are learners themselves.

The work of school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff requires a sophisticated array of knowledge, skills and attributes, which, in the face of constant and rapid social, economic, technological and educational change, requires continual enhancement. For this reason, staff in our schools are encouraged to engage in professional learning, always seeking innovative and sustainable ways to improve their practice. To assist with this, a number of sponsored study courses are open to staff in Catholic schools which give this opportunity.<sup>12</sup>

As outlined on the CEOM Professional Pathways webpage, each Catholic Education Office across the four dioceses of Victoria recognises that continuing professional learning is an essential component of school improvement and staff development. In particular,

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<sup>8</sup>(Second Vatican Council, 1965)

<sup>9</sup>(Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2012)

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>(Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2012)

our experience has demonstrated that professional learning is a major contributing factor towards improvement in student learning outcomes. For these reasons there is a commitment to:

- allocating resources to develop schools as learning communities
- facilitating ongoing religious formation of staff to enhance the Catholic identity of our schools
- advancing leadership enrichment opportunities
- building capacity in all areas of teaching and learning
- making available regular professional learning activities for Catholic school staff through the My Integrated Professional Learning System (My IPLS) and providing information about programs delivered by external organisations.<sup>13</sup>

Professional learning covers a broad range of areas including:

- Australian Curriculum
- Contemporary Learning
- Curriculum & Innovation
- eLearning
- Financial Procedures
- Induction & Marketing
- Industrial Relations
- Leadership
- Legal Issues
- Literacy
- Languages
- Numeracy & Mathematics
- Pathways & Transition
- Religious Education
- Science
- School Boards
- School Improvement
- Student Services
- Student Wellbeing<sup>14</sup>

By providing these opportunities we recognise that effective schools are learning communities where all staff are lifelong learners.

### **School Improvement Plans**

Catholic schools, and their system authorities, have a joint responsibility to ensure that students are provided with the optimal learning environment where they can achieve their best.

In 2005, the CEOM developed the School Improvement Framework. Since then, all Victorian Diocese have developed similar School Improvement Plan processes.

This framework addresses the dual purpose of satisfying legitimate expectations of government and sector authorities about accountability for the outcomes of schooling; and to assist schools and teachers to improve student learning outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

The framework recognises the distinctive nature of Catholic schooling, combining a structured approach to improvement planning with a component of external assessment and accountability.

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<sup>13</sup>ibid.

<sup>14</sup>ibid.

<sup>15</sup>(Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2012)

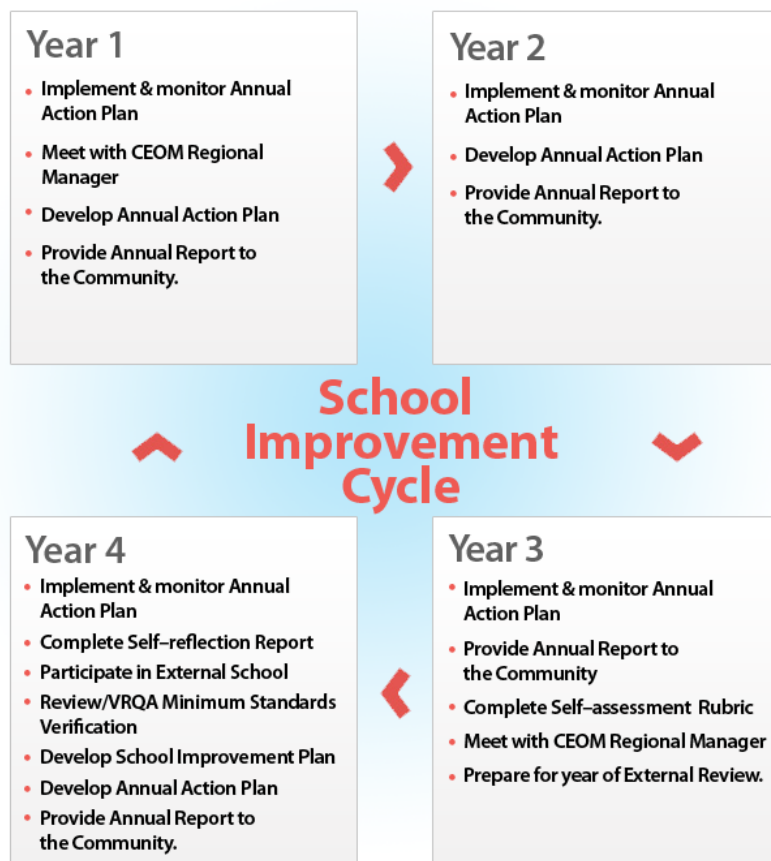
The framework seeks to support schools in establishing the organisational conditions that support continuous improvement, ensure that the unique features of each school situation are recognised and that strategies are built on the basis of an analysis of that particular context.<sup>16</sup>

The framework promotes an evidence-based inquiry approach to planning within the school. It requires schools to incorporate ongoing monitoring and evaluation of student outcomes to ensure continuous school improvement and to regularly reflect upon questions such as:

- How are we going?
- How do we know?
- What would we like to achieve?
- What do we have to do to achieve these outcomes?
- How will we know whether we have achieved what we want?<sup>17</sup>

In May this year, the Sandhurst Diocese launched a website which articulates their Charter of Sandhurst School Improvement (COSSI)<sup>18</sup>. According to this, the full school review is one of a series of reviews designed to assist schools to plan, monitor and evaluate progress in school improvement. The stages of this include a development, implementation, evaluation and school, review phase. This is supplemented by an annual action plan and annual reporting requirements. COSSI features five areas which together promote school improvement. They include: Catholic identity, leadership, learning and teaching, pastoral wellbeing and stewardship or resources.

As an example, the CEOM framework operates on a four year cycle:



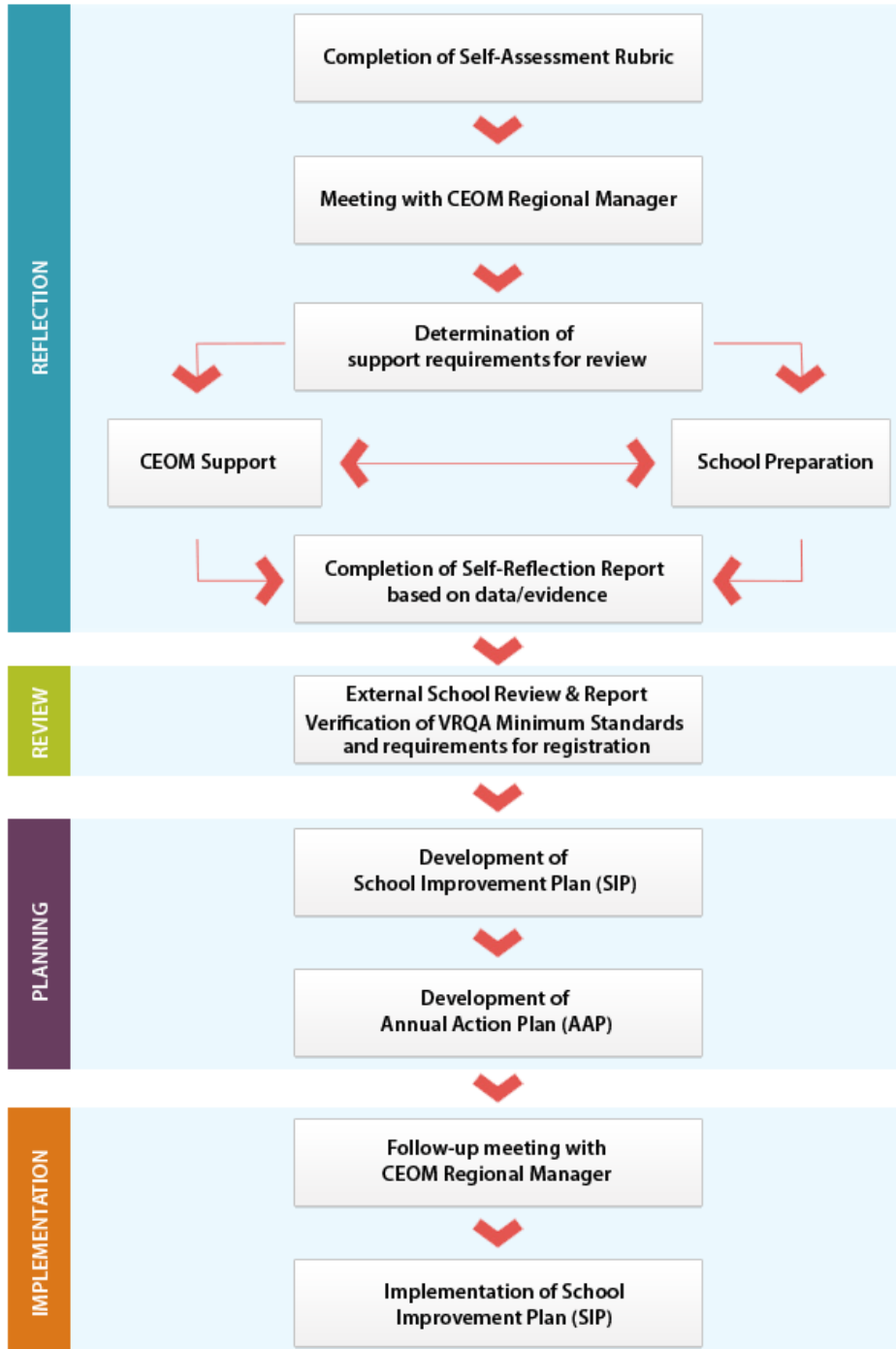
<sup>16</sup>ibid.

<sup>17</sup>ibid.

<sup>18</sup>(Catholic Education Office Sandhurst, 2012)

Accompanying the School Improvement Framework (SIF) is the School Review Process (SRP) which is the process whereby a School Improvement Plan (SIP) is formulated. This process involves five stages which are further outlined on the CEOM School Improvement Framework webpage and briefly explained below.

School Review Process



## 1. Reflection

The self-reflection process involves schools using tools including the self-assessment rubric and self-reflection report, as well as meeting and working in consultation with system authorities.

In the year prior to scheduled external review, principals are provided with a short Self-Assessment Rubric that assists them in their preparation. The rubric is designed to promote dialogue with the leadership team of the school and assist schools to determine where the school is located on a School Improvement Continuum in each sphere of schooling.

Once the Self-Assessment Rubric is completed the principal and in some cases the parish Priest (or their representative) are invited to meet with the relevant Regional Manager and Principal Consultant to discuss issues pertinent to the school's preparation for the review year.

Such a meeting assists in determining the school's readiness for the review process and any specific requirements. As a consequence resources are able to be more strategically managed to ensure ongoing support for schools in their school improvement journey.

In this section schools are asked to address a series of questions relating to the five spheres of schooling:

- What did we aim to do within this sphere of schooling?
- To what extent did we achieve our goals, intended outcomes and targets? What evidence do we have available to support this?
- Why were we successful/not successful in our achievements as stated in the SIP for this sphere?
- How is our Catholic School Vision embedded in what we achieved?
- What would we like to achieve in the future?

Schools are required to show evidence of the use of data from various instruments which include NAPLAN, Literacy Reports and Numeracy data. In addition, schools are supported to gather, interpret and analyse attitudinal data from a range of staff, student and parent surveys. Schools are encouraged to supplement these with additional qualitative data collected at a school level.

## 2. Review

The external school review is conducted by an independent external school reviewer who receives the school self-reflection report at least two weeks before the panel meeting and will organise a two-day visit to the school to conduct the external review. A timetable is negotiated with the principal and the external school reviewer and includes meetings with the principal, the Church authority, the leadership team, staff, parents and students.

As part of this process, the Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority (VRQA) Minimum Standards verification is also completed by the external school reviewer.

The reviewer critiques the performance data, evidence and any additional information gathered by the school relevant to their school Self-Reflection report, recommending refinements or further development to be considered in the formation of the ensuing School Improvement Plan (SIP). An external school review report is prepared and provides a basis for further dialogue and planning.

### 3. Planning

As part of the School Review Process, schools are required to develop their School Improvement Plan (SIP).

The SIP is developed in the context of the Diocese and describes the planning for the next four years, expressed through goals, intended outcomes and clearly identified targets. A School Improvement Plan template is available to assist schools in this development process.

In conjunction with SIPs, it is expected that schools will develop and implement more specific annual action plans. A template for the Annual Action Plan (AAP) is available to assist schools in documenting the specific actions required in working towards achievement of the longer-term goals, intended outcomes and targets.

### 4. Implementation

The school commits itself to achieving the goals and targets by implementing actions as outlined in the Annual Action Plan.

In the year following the external school review, the principal and the Church authority are invited to meet with the relevant system authority. This is an opportunity to ensure that the school improvement planning process are well under way, to identify further support required by the school and allow for appropriate resource allocation for the following year.

The ability to genuinely engage with all members of the community – students, staff and parents – is integral to each school's journey of continuous school improvement.

Schools are accountable to their relevant system authority as well as government and the school community. The School Improvement Framework is designed to satisfy expectations of these bodies in relation to accountability for the outcomes of schooling.

The School Improvement Framework retains the expectation that schools report to their school community on an annual basis. To assist in this process a template is available to ensure that the annual report is concise and in a style which is appropriate for the school community. The template incorporates requirements of the Australian and Victorian Government regulations.

The Victorian Government has legislative requirements that all schools be reviewed against prescribed minimum standards. A compliance check is completed every four years by Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne as part of the School Review Process. Annual Reports to the Community are published on the VRQA website.

Catholic schools in Victoria recognise the benefits of engaging with the School Improvement Framework.

## Part 2: Local decision making works

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### **Subsidiarity and Autonomy**

The Second Vatican Council Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*) highlights the importance of subsidiarity and the freedom of parents to choice of school:

“... (The state) must always keep in mind the principle of subsidiarity so that there is no kind of school monopoly, for this is opposed to the native rights of the human person, to the development and spread of culture, to the peaceful association of citizens and to the pluralism that exists today in ever so many societies.”<sup>19</sup>

The CECV operates a highly devolved model of governance, based on the principle of subsidiarity, under which decisions are taken at the lowest competent level. This provides considerable autonomy to school principals and other school staff over pedagogy, curriculum, staffing, facilities and finances.

System authorities work in partnership with schools to achieve quality outcomes for students and promote the ongoing development of the sector. The CECV provides an overarching framework, which supports school policies, where this is appropriate.

Australian and international research shows that school autonomy is a driver for better school and student achievement. Analysis of results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that autonomy, diversity and choice in education prove to be positive characteristics of strong performing education systems.<sup>20</sup>

Feedback from our schools, coupled with evidence from the Interim Report of the Building the Education Revolution Implementation Taskforce, supports the contention that local management arrangements in Catholic schools reduced costs and delivered better value for money.<sup>21</sup>

For these reasons, it is essential that the principle of subsidiarity and autonomy continue to be respected and not be impeded by government.

### **Forming Educational Leaders**

As our schools are religious in nature, educational leadership is distinctive for our system.

Leadership plays a key role in shaping the conditions and climate in which effective teaching and learning occurs. Effective educational leaders engage and inspire school communities to develop a shared vision, mission and strategic directions for their school.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the professional learning opportunities available to staff, the CEOM has developed a Leadership Continuum which helps identify and develop educational leaders in our schools. The Leadership Continuum identifies and supports:

- Emerging Leaders,
- Established Leaders,
- Aspirant Principals,
- Initial Principals,
- Experienced Principals and;
- Mentor Principals.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>(Second Vatican Council, 1965)

<sup>20</sup>(Programme for International Student Assessment, 2009)

<sup>21</sup>(Building the Education Revolution Implementation Taskforce, 2010)

<sup>22</sup>(Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2012)

<sup>23</sup>(Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2012)

This Leadership Continuum aims to promote and develop shared, visionary and inspirational leadership, where leaders at all levels will inspire, encourage and support their colleagues to reflect on and improve their practice to improve student learning.

Leaders in Catholic schools aim to promote a culture of creativity and innovative practice, where leaders will empower each other and their colleagues to explore new and improved structures and approaches to teaching and learning.



## **Part 3: The success of our school communities**

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The education of each student in our schools is a partnership between parents<sup>24</sup> as the first educators of their child and the school to whom they entrust their child. This partnership is supported by collaboration with the parish priest, and in some cases the religious institute responsible for the school; with the parish community, the relevant school authority and the wider community.

The Second Vatican Council Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*) exhorts that parents must be free to choose which school their child attends: “Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools.”<sup>25</sup>

Building upon this basis, in 1988 the Congregation for Catholic Education emphasised the partnership that must be formed between families and school communities:

“Partnership between a Catholic school and the families of the students must continue and be strengthened: not simply to be able to deal with academic problems that may arise, but rather so that the educational goals of the school can be achieved. Close cooperation with the family is especially important when treating sensitive issues such as religious, moral, or sexual education, orientation toward a profession, or a choice of one’s vocation in life. It is not a question of convenience, but a partnership based on faith. Catholic tradition teaches that God has bestowed on the family its own specific and unique educational mission.”<sup>26</sup>

Canon law further highlights the cooperation needed between school communities and families:

There must be the closest cooperation between parents and the teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated. In fulfilling their task, teachers are to collaborate closely with the parents and willingly listen to them; associations and meetings of parents are to be set up and held in high esteem.<sup>27</sup>

### **Family & School Partnerships**

Catholic schools respect that parents have a significantly important part to play in the school community.

Catholic schools assist parents to fulfil their obligation for the Christian formation and education of their children. The Catholic school respects parents’ fundamental right to know, understand and share in decisions that affect the education of their children.

Research demonstrates that effective schools have high levels of parent and community engagement. Such engagement with the school is strongly related to enhanced wellbeing, positive behaviours and improved student learning.<sup>28</sup>

Parents continue to influence their children’s learning and development during the school years and beyond. This is why it is important for parents and schools to work together in partnership.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Nb. The terms ‘parents’ and ‘family’ are used interchangeably and refer to any adult caregiver or group of caregivers who play a primary role in a child’s cognitive, social, and emotional development including grandparents, foster parents and extended family members.

<sup>25</sup>(Second Vatican Council, 1965)

<sup>26</sup>(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988)

<sup>27</sup>(The Holy See, 1998)

<sup>28</sup>(Bryk, 1998), (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

Our schools continue to actively engage parents in their child's learning, since this is critical to each student's wellbeing and learning.

In addition to partnering with parents and families, Catholic schools are community centres, building and strengthening links with the local community to further support the development and wellbeing of students and their families. Catholic schools promote and develop collaborative networks of learning to enrich learning opportunities with the sharing of expertise.

System authorities have produced a range of resources and information for parents to assist them to engage in partnership with their local parish primary school and secondary schools.<sup>30</sup>

As an example, the CEOM has identified three principles for the relationship between parents, families and school communities. They are outlined below:

1. **Contribution:** Parents have knowledge and skills which they can contribute at all levels, to assist their children's learning, to support the school's goals and to promote the principles of Catholic education.
2. **Partnership:** Effective partnerships for the education of children are based on a foundation of shared values and mutual respect between parents and all members of the Catholic system. These partnerships acknowledge the respective roles and responsibilities of each of the participants involved.
3. **Whole-system Approach:** Parent involvement and participation are valued and encouraged at all levels of Catholic education through the creation of an environment in which parents feel welcomed and are able to contribute as valued partners.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>(Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2012)

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

## Conclusion

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This submission has outlined key elements of the Catholic education system in Victoria. We are proud of what has been achieved so far and we are confident that we can build on these achievements in the future.

This submission has specifically highlighted the ways in which our system supports teachers and school leaders and encourages school and family partnerships. A significant part of the submission has detailed the school review process which offers our schools the opportunity to reflect upon their achievements and consider areas for improvement. Most importantly, this submission has articulated why system subsidiarity and principal autonomy are vital to the ongoing success of Catholic education.

Individually and combined, these elements are critical for school improvement which maximises investment in education.

### **Fair Funding for Catholic schools**

It is important for this submission to briefly reflect upon our contemporary context.

The Congregation for Catholic Education has respectfully suggested that the State should recognise and respect the work and contribution of Catholic schools.

“That Catholic schools help to form good citizens is a fact apparent to everyone. Both government policy and public opinion should, therefore, recognize the work these schools do as a real service to society... Fortunately, a good number of countries have a growing understanding ... for the Catholic school.”<sup>32</sup>

Building on this point, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has suggested that equitable public funding for non-government schools is not only a matter of justice, but also contributes to parents exercising freedom of choice when determining a school for their child:

“Public authorities must see to it that public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens. Parents should not have to sustain, directly or indirectly, extra charges which would deny or unjustly limit the exercise of this freedom. The refusal to provide public economic support to non-public schools that need assistance and that render a service to civil society is to be considered an injustice.”<sup>33</sup>

The Council continues:

“Whenever the State lays claim to an educational monopoly, it oversteps its rights and offends justice ... The State cannot without injustice merely tolerate so-called private schools. Such schools render a public service and therefore have a right to financial assistance”<sup>34</sup>

Working with parents, and families, Catholic schools remain committed to providing broad access for all Catholic families, while ensuring an education of the highest quality.

It is the goal of the Catholic education sector to secure equitable and sustainable funding to ensure that we can provide accessible, affordable Catholic schools for all Catholic families. It is also our goal to ensure effective stewardship of resources, so that resources of all kinds are used wisely and sustainably for the benefit of students now and in the future. Our schools aim to maintain and support a system that assist all Catholic schools deliver a high-quality and contemporary education in a resource-efficient manner.

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<sup>32</sup>(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988)

<sup>33</sup>(Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004)

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

Our schools need funding certainty. The lack of detail to date around the federal government's National Plan for School Improvement (NPSI) is frustrating.<sup>35</sup>

The additional requirements proposed for schools through the NPSI have the potential to detract from the core business of teaching and learning. Catholic education already does most of what has been suggested – and we do it well.

From what we understand so far, the NPSI prescribes:

- Increased reporting requirements upon our schools including the publication of a prescribed School Improvement Plan.
- Specifications of how teachers and principals spend their time.
- Specifications of how schools relate to parents and the community.<sup>36</sup>

As it stands:

- Our schools already produce School Improvement Plans which are adaptive to the local need of the school community.
- Our schools, supported by their system authorities, provide significant professional support and development opportunities to staff and school leaders.
- Our schools successfully foster partnerships between school communities and families.

Catholic education will continue to work with the Australian Government to ensure that our rich tradition of system subsidiarity and principal autonomy is respected.

Given the financial circumstance of government, there is a risk that schools will be subject to additional regulatory and reporting burdens. This could have a negligible cost for the government if mandated but could cost schools and school authorities energy, time and money to implement according to the proposed regulation.

It is dangerous for the Australian government to make decisions that affect the operation of our school communities, whilst being removed from the realities of the class room and school yard.

The CECV will continue to work with government to advocate on behalf of our school communities for fair funding based on the following three principles:

- Additional funding to Catholic schools is needed to close the resources gap between Catholic schools and government schools.
- Government funding must keep pace with the cost of educating a child in a government school.
- Fair funding for students with disability and special needs is essential, so that all students, regardless of the school they attend, receive funding to meet their needs.

We look forward to ongoing discussions with government, about the matters raised in this submission, for the betterment of children in our schools.

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<sup>35</sup>(National Catholic Education Commission, 2012)

<sup>36</sup><http://www.betterschools.gov.au/>

In conclusion, we think it important to restate that:

- Catholic education has learnt much in the more than 170 years that our schools have been operating.
- Current government funding arrangements mean that Catholic schools operate with less funding than government schools.
- Although this is the case, Catholic education is proud of all that has been achieved and notes that we continue to perform strongly in many domains.

We once again reiterate that the distinctive character of Catholic education is built upon five elements: a combination of good leaders, good teachers, effective school/family partnerships, school subsidiarity and school/system collaboration in the context of a faith filled community. This strong platform enables Catholic education to achieve and contribute to education in a unique way. It is important that the Australian government understands and respects this.

We hope that the Committee, and indeed the Australian government, will draw upon the example and practice of Catholic education; some of which is articulated in this submission.

Drawing on its knowledge and expertise as a significant education system, the CECV is pleased to have had the opportunity of making this submission about *maximising the investment in Australian schools*.

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