

Quality Schooling



BRIEFING PAPER

FEDERAL ELECTION 2013

At its heart, Catholic schooling is an invitation by the church to parents, students and teachers to an ongoing encounter with Christ. Our moral purpose is located within the evangelising mission of the church and its commitment to provide quality Catholic schooling.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Parramatta seek to deliver quality Catholic schooling through our system strategic intent by:

- improving the learning outcomes for all students, and
- promoting a professional and rewarding working life for teachers

Core to this intent are these underlying principles:

- every child can and will learn
- every child deserves a great teacher
- diversity is the norm
- teachers are learners too
- teachers must be valued as professionals to make good pedagogical decisions
- schools are best placed to respond to local learning and teaching needs

The newly passed Australian Education Act (2013) and the National Education Reform Agreement (NERA), which commences in 2014, largely reflects the underlying principles and intent of our system. However, the implementation of this agenda will be crucial in ensuring the authenticity, sustainability and growth of Catholic education in western Sydney in the future, namely:

1. PROTECTING CHOICE

- Parents have a right to choose the type of schooling they want for their children. This choice is a fundamental right in guaranteeing religious freedom and expression.
- Ensuring choice requires equitable government funding across all schools to allow those from lower socio-economic backgrounds to have the same access to, and choice of, schooling.

2. ENSURING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS ARE 'CATHOLIC'

- In order for Catholic schools to authentically maintain their identity and mission, the Catholic school sector must continue to be able to employ staff who are committed to the values and teachings of the Catholic Church, particularly for those staff who hold leadership positions, teach Religious Education or are responsible for the formation of students.
- Formation, through witness to the faith, is key to the evangelising mission of Catholic schools. The growing pressure to remove anti-discrimination exemptions for

'to ensure that the Australian schooling system provides a high quality and highly equitable education for all students'

Australian Education Act (2013).

faith-based schools would effectively legislate against the employment of staff who meet this essential criteria of teaching in a Catholic school.

3. MAINTAINING DIOCESAN (SYSTEM) AUTONOMY

- The National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) prescribes unprecedented federal power over schooling, while espousing the need for local autonomy.
- The ultimate responsibility for the continuation, development and administration of Catholic systemic schools rests with the Bishop in each diocese as the pastoral leader of the church in the region.
- Maintaining local authority at the diocesan or system level is crucial, not only for the exercise of this responsibility, but also to ensure enterprise solutions and the flexibility to respond adequately to local system and school needs.
- This relies on the recognition by government of local church autonomy in delivering quality Catholic schooling and the continuation of 'block funding' to the Catholic sector.

4. MEASURING REFORM

- The National Education Reform Agenda (NERA) seeks to devolve local autonomy to schools, while simultaneously setting strict performance accountabilities and reporting requirements.
- The practice of teaching cannot be reduced to the following of externally-set rules and the meeting of targets. Teachers must be allowed to exercise professional judgement about curriculum content and the means of instruction.
- Broad-based quality evidence must be used to inform, transform and form policy development and implementation, and policy success must not only be measured by things that are easy to measure (e.g. NAPLAN, OECD data, etc) but measured using sound research and comprehensive data over time.



Quality Schooling



BRIEFING PAPER

FEDERAL ELECTION 2013

5. COLLABORATION IN SETTING THE EDUCATIONAL AGENDA

- Schooling is a collective responsibility and one that requires cooperation and collaboration across political and ideological viewpoints, across levels of government and school sectors, and with the involvement of the teaching profession and families, to ensure the best possible schooling opportunities for Australian children.
- Education policy must respond, over the long term, to the changing nature of schooling in a rapidly changing world. It must value diversity and innovation while promoting excellence and equity.
- Education policy and planning must not be dictated by terms of government, but must be an ongoing conversation about the nature and purpose of schooling and a path of continuous improvement.

6. CATERING FOR GROWTH

- While the new school funding agreement makes provisions for the recurrent costs of education, an appropriate funding model needs to be developed for the significant investment needed for the ongoing capital works, maintenance and the building of new schools to ensure Catholic schools can adequately sustain growth.
- Crucial to this, is the recognition that Catholic schools are not-for-profit and contribute to the social fabric of the community and therefore should not be burdened by the planning and development regulations of 'for-profit' developers.

7. FUTURE OF WESTERN SYDNEY

- As the third largest economy and one of the most diverse regions in Australia, western Sydney provides a unique opportunity to become a centre of learning and innovation through:
 - greater partnerships between schools and other education providers e.g. Universities, TAFE, private providers
 - collaboration with business, government and education sectors to develop enterprise solutions for learning and embed schools within the broader community
 - investment in educational research and technological development in western Sydney

THE FACTS

- One in every five Australian students attends a Catholic school (**one in every four** in western Sydney).
- Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta has 78 Catholic schools incorporating two Catholic Trade Training Centres



We must deliver an experience of schooling that meets the learning needs of **students in today's world** and prepares them to **respond creatively** to the opportunities and challenges we will face in the future.

and four Catholic Early Learning Centres (preschools) serving over 43,000 students and employing over 4,500 teachers and staff.

- According to the latest data provided by the Australian Government's My School website, even with parental contributions included, **Catholic schools operate at only 90%** of the recurrent resources of government schools.

REFERENCES

- *Catholic schools at a crossroads*, Pastoral Letter of NSW-ACT Bishops (2007) <http://bit.ly/14598lr>
- Reach Catholic Education Framework: *Strategic Intent, Theory of Action and Statement on Learning* (2010) www.parra.catholic.edu.au
- Australian Education Act (2013)
- National Education Reform Agreement (commencing 2014)

