VICTORIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS PARENT BODY

ANNUAL REPORT for 2014
Catholic Leadership Centre
Corner Victoria Parade and Hoddle Street
East Melbourne

19 May 2014

It is with much pleasure that I present to all Catholic school parents* the Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB) Annual Report for 2014.

Council Members
The current VCSPB Council members are:
Tracey O’Neill (Chair)
Lisa Hughes (Deputy Chair)
Bob O’Shea
Morgan Murphy
Rachel Saliba
Dennis Torpy (CECV representative)

Council Vacancies exist in Sandhurst and Sale and Melbourne.

This AGM is earlier than our usual November AGM. This is because we are amending our Constitution to allow VCSPB to have Council members from a broader range of parents than previously possible. This is an exciting step for VCSPB. For some time now we have been working towards expanding the eligibility criteria of the Constitution to ensure that we are able to represent parents of children in Catholic schools in Victoria to the best of our ability. We thank Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV) and the directors of each Catholic Education Office for their vision in supporting this important change.

Since our AGM in November 2013, VCSPB has welcomed two new members: Bob O’Shea from the Diocese of Ballarat and Morgan Murphy from the Diocese of Sandhurst. Tonight we welcome Rachel Saliba from the Archdiocese of Melbourne (Northern Region). Once our new Constitution has been ratified, an additional member for Sandhurst will join us.

Whilst there has only been a short time since our last AGM, the VCSPB has been busy ensuring the voice of parents of children in Catholic schools has been heard both in Federal and State Inquiries.

- VCSPB provided a submission to the Federal Government’s Inquiry into Enhancing Online Safety for Children. This submission focused on making a distinction between the behaviour of children and the behaviour of adults/sexual predators. With respect to children and young people our focus was on educating them about the risks of engaging in cyber bullying through social media and on the risks of giving out personal information online rather than an oppressive prosecution regime. The submission is available on our website.

- VCSPB also provided a submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into approaches to Homework. Our focus was that homework should not be oppressive, but that it could be used as tool to engage parents in their children’s education. This was on the basis that where parents are engaged in their children’s education the evidence shows that the educational outcomes for children are better. We emphasised that parents need to be

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supported to take on this role particularly with children in secondary school, but that it was possible to engage them in a positive way. Our submission is on our [website](#).

- On 20 March 2014, on behalf of VCSPB, I attended a meeting with the *Consultation Panel for the Australian National Curriculum Review* (Professor Ken Wiltshire AO and Dr Kevin Donnelly). At this meeting VCSPB emphasised the importance of parent choice and the right of parents to be able to select a faith based school and a school that is able to teach religion as part of the curriculum. The panel was very interested in what parents thought about curriculum. VCSPB raised with the panel the fact that curriculum is a difficult area for parents and that parents see the curriculum as a tool for educators more than a tool for parents. If parents were to be involved in this process, then more would need to be done to engage parents in that process and to breakdown the language barrier. It was an interesting meeting, the panel was genuinely interested in parent engagement and in our views on faith based schools.

The VCSPB made a submission to Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in 2010 and had many updates/insights/discussions with Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) through its Parent Group which meets 3 times a year. The VCSPB acknowledged that a common Australian curriculum has the benefit of making efficient and effective use of the resources of the community. We also acknowledge that a high quality Australian curriculum will better enable parents and schools to deal with interstate or international family movements.

The VCSPB sought a curriculum that is understood by the community, including parents, students and employers to

- be balanced, coherent and academically rigorous as well as clear, concise and accessible
- be teacher friendly
- not be prescriptive
- be based on evidence – student centered, progress appropriate content
- be able to include religious education in Catholic schools
- have local and topical content
- have the capacity for teachers to differentiate their teaching and ensure time for learning to meet individual student needs
- be aligned within and to the many learning pathways in secondary years
- prescribe core and essential learning (not the total learning for all students at all levels and progression or optional studies or based on time allocation)
- state General Capabilities as in Victoria (AusVELS)
- not have listed Cross Curriculum Priorities as these will change over time

VCSPB has been invited to be part of the *Family School Partnership Framework Refinement Project* with meetings set up for 24 May 2014 in Shepparton and 30 May 2014 in Melbourne with a video hook up with Ballarat and possibly Sale. This is an exciting opportunity for VCSPB to share the exciting work of CEOM in developing a parental engagement tool and to do its part in the formulation of a national parental engagement framework.

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Shortly, VCSPB is to release a media statement on the implications of the recently announced Commonwealth Budget and National Commission of Audit Report on Catholic school funding and families in our schools.

At the February 2014 meeting of Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA), I was elected to the Executive of that body (the Executive is Tony O’Byrne (formerly Principal of Aquinas College in Melbourne) as the Independent Chair, Danielle Cronin Deputy Chair (from NSW), Carmel Nash (from Qld), John Beaton as interim Operating Officer and myself). CSPA is well on the way to establishing itself as national peak parent body for Catholic School parents. The work of CSPA since February this year has included:

- communicating with key stakeholders in government and within Catholic education
- appearing before the Senate Select Committee on School Funding and making submissions on the importance of Catholic schools receiving adequate funding.
- appearing before the National Curriculum Review Consultative Panel and made submissions on the right of parents to select a faith based school and for religious education to be part of a child’s learning.
- a media release on the Audit Commission recommendation that access to Family Tax benefit should be reduced and that all education funding should be controlled by the States.
- a media release on the Budget expressing concerning about the uncertainty for funding of Catholic schools in the future and supporting the statements made by National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC).

In the coming months, VCSPB will continue to ensure that parent voice is heard both within our system and by external stakeholders. With a State election this year, VCSPB intends to talk to all parties to ascertain what their policies are and to ensure that the rights of parents with children in Catholic schools are not adversely affected. As always VCSPB will continue to work collaboratively with the Catholic Education Offices in each Arch/diocese to ensure that our system provides the best possible outcomes for our children.

VCSPB will continue to work with other parent groups (Parents Victoria – government schools, and the Victorian Parents Council – independent schools) on projects of common interest.

Tracey O’Neill
Chair

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