19 May 2015

It is with much pleasure that I present to all Catholic school parents* the Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB) Annual Report for 2015.

Council Members
The current VCSPB Council members are:
  Tracey O’Neill (Chair)
  Lisa Hughes (Deputy Chair)
  Bob O’Shea (resigned 13 May 2015)
  Morgan Murphy
  Sally Livermore
  Rachel Saliba
  Suzi Knowles
  Dennis Torpy (CECV representative)

Council vacancies exist in Sale and Melbourne.

Since our AGM in 2014, the Council has welcomed two new members: Sally Livermore from the Diocese of Sandhurst and Suzi Knowles from the Diocese of Sale. We look forward to welcoming a new member from the Archdiocese of Melbourne in June 2015. We thank Bob O’Shea for his contributions during his term on the Council as a representative of the Diocese of Ballarat.

Listening to you
Continuing with our commitment to all regions of Victoria, the Council held its August 2014 meeting in Bendigo and then held a parent forum in Bendigo and by video link in Shepparton. There was so much positive energy in our forum and so many ideas of how we can achieve genuine parental engagement.

Collaborating with Catholic education
The VCSPB works collaboratively with Catholic education in Victoria, enabling the voice of parents as stakeholders in Catholic education to be heard at State and national levels.

Regular contact with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) Executive Director and Directors of each Catholic Education Office in 2014 has been very beneficial to the work of VCSPB to ensure that our system provides the best possible outcomes for our children and our schools.

Funding for our schools
The ability of parents to be able to select a school of their choice for their child is of critical importance. Without fair and equitable funding for Catholic schools, many parents would not be able to exercise that choice.

On 26 February 2015, both the Victorian Government and the Opposition honoured their commitments to legislate annual funding for each child in Catholic education. The Education and Training Reform (funding for non-government schools) Amendment Act 2006 (Vic.) passed its final

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hurdle in the Legislative Council, 29 votes to 6. The changes link Catholic school funding to 25 per cent of the cost of Victorian government schools.

While this push for change was led by the CECV, there is no doubt that each and every Catholic school community has played a vital role in bring this legislation about.

For this Bill to be passed by Parliament as one of the first pieces of legislation for the new Victorian Government is important. This change is proof that parent voice is important politically and that politicians value the Catholic education system and the views of the parents of children in Catholic schools.

On 22 April 2015 Minister Pyne held a cross-sectoral meeting on emerging issues at Aquinas College Ringwood. We attended this meeting and met Minister Pyne just before he spoke at the meeting. Minister Pyne spoke about the guidelines that he has asked AITSL to produce following the recommendations of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group. These guidelines aim to improve the quality of the education that pre-service teachers receive and also ensure that the institutions that educate teachers have quality programs in place. Obviously as parents we support any initiative that improves the training that teachers receive particularly if that training acknowledges the important role that parents play in educating our children.

Government and independent school parent bodies
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.

Our Strategic Plan 2015-2018
Our strategic plan came to an end in December 2014. Council engaged an external consultant to help draft a plan that will truly make our work more strategic to ensure that all parents of children and young people in Catholic schools will have the best representation possible.

We confirmed our guiding principles.

Our Council shares a set of beliefs about the role of parents and the VCSPB in education. These beliefs are our source of inspiration as well as a guiding hand as we focus our efforts and contribution to improve outcomes for Catholic schools and their students:

• Our Catholic ethos, in particular the Scriptural values of equity, justice, and the respect and acknowledgement of the inherent dignity of each individual, is an expression of our Catholic identity. It guides our operations and underpins our policies, practices and processes.

• Parents are the first and primary educators of their children.

• When schools and families work together in partnership guided by the Catholic ethos, children benefit, schools improve and communities flourish.

• Every parent has the right to choose a quality Catholic education for their child regardless of their background, and to not be disadvantaged by that choice.

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Every parent has the right to be informed about, and inform policy decisions that relate to the education of their child

Partnership, collaboration and effective communication are key to the VCSPB’s influence

The four core pillars below were identified to assist in setting overarching goals which will direct our work program.

Key goals/objectives for 2015/16 will be focussed on maintaining our place at the decision making table both within the system and with government. We will also be focussing on parent connectedness commencing with a new project from August 2015.

Submissions
Our submissions are available on our website.
- Federal Government Teacher Education Review
- Victorian Institute of Teaching Permission to Teach Policy Review

Consultations
The VCSPB hosted two focus group sessions with parents and Catholic Education Office staff from all four dioceses to review the Family School and Community Partnerships Framework, aiming to improve knowledge of the framework and accessibility for schools, families and communities.

VCSPB website and quarterly Bulletin
The Bulletin and a range of collated resources are available on our website including links to websites with resources on: Bullying; Catholic Identity; Curriculum; Parent Engagement; Parenting and Safe Schools.

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA)
The VCSPB continues to advocate for parent voice at the national level through membership of the CSPA. I continue to be a member of the Executive and with Dennis Torpy represent Victorian Catholic school parents on the CSPA Council.

The CSPA continues to build connections with key stakeholders in government and within Catholic education on behalf of parents.

The VCSPB Council thanks our Catholic school parents, the CECV and each Catholic Education Office Director for their ongoing support of our work on behalf of parents, our children and Catholic education.

Tracey O’Neill
Chair

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