ANNUAL REPORT 2016

It is with much pleasure that I present to all Catholic school parents* the Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB) Annual Report for 2016.

Council Members

VCSPB Council members prior to AGM:
Tracey O’Neill (Chair and CSPA representative)
Morgan Murphy (Deputy Chair)
Lisa Hughes (Deputy Chair)
Anastasia Ah Tong
Alexandra Briggs
Nicole Wiseman
Rhyannon Elliott
Dennis Torpy (CECV and CSPA representative)
Rachel Saliba (Executive Officer)

VCSPB will induct new member, Jennifer Griffiths in March 2017, following her appointment as the new Parent Engagement Officer in the Diocese of Sandhurst.

VCSPB Council vacancies exist in Sale, Ballarat and Melbourne.

Since our AGM on 19th May 2015, VCSPB has welcomed three new members: Nicole Wiseman from the Diocese of Ballarat, Alexandra Briggs from the Archdiocese of Melbourne (South Eastern region) and Rhyannon Elliott from the Archdiocese of Melbourne (Eastern region) who commenced her membership with the Council at the AGM on November 10.

In 2016 two of our members, Sally Livermore from the Diocese of Sandhurst and Suzi Knowles from the Diocese of Sale resigned from the VCSPB council due to personal reasons.

Collaborating with Catholic education – developing relationships with stakeholders

The Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB) works collaboratively with Catholic education in Victoria, enabling the perspective of parents as stakeholders in Catholic education to be heard at State and Federal levels.

Regular contact with the CECV Executive Director and Directors of each Catholic Education Office in 2016 has been highly beneficial to the work of VCSPB to ensure that our system provides the best possible outcomes for our children and our schools.

In August 2016, Tracey O’Neill (Chair) and Rachel Saliba (Executive Officer) met with Director of Catholic Education in Sandhurst, Mr Paul Desmond who began as Director in January 2015 and was previously secondary school Principal of St. Francis Xavier College in the Diocese of Sale.

Mr Desmond looks forward to building on the relationships his predecessor (Ms Billington) had with VCSPB and continuing the collaboration with the Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, particularly through close connection with the two delegates from Sandhurst, Morgan Murphy and new nominee, Jennifer Griffiths, who will commence as Parent Engagement Officer for the Diocese of Sandhurst in January 2017. We look forward to inducting and welcoming Jennifer in the new year.

During August 2016, Rachel Saliba met with the Director of Catholic Education in the Diocese of Sale, Ms Maria Kirkwood. Ms Kirkwood is very much looking forward to collaborating and working with the VCSPB in future and in nominating two new members for VCSPB Council to represent the parents of the Diocese of Sale.

In early September 2016, Rachel Saliba and Nicole Wiseman met the Director of Catholic Education in the Diocese of Ballarat, Ms Audrey Brown. Ms Brown expressed a clear desire to continue her close collaboration and work with the VCSPB, namely through quarterly meetings with current VCSPB Ballarat representative Nicole Wiseman and a new council member, who will be nominated and commence once current Chair Tracey O’Neill’s resignation takes effect following the November 2016 AGM.

* The term parent refers to all parents of children in Catholic schools and is used to include natural, adoptive or foster parents, guardians and primary caregivers of students.
VCSPB has continued a range of efforts to develop relationships with key stakeholders this year, including:

- **Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV)** – The VCSPB Chair, supported by council’s CECV representative, continued to build strong links and open communication channels with CECV, particularly with CECV Executive Director Stephen Elder via regular meetings each school term in 2016.

- **Members of staff across Catholic Education Melbourne** – working closely with members of the Student Wellbeing Unit and the school governance officer on various initiatives and projects.

- **Parent bodies from the Government (Parents Victoria) and Independent (Victorian Parents Council) sectors** through regular meetings with Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA), Parents and Schools Community Organisation (PaSCO), Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), Department of Education and Training (DET) and Australian Parents Council (APC).

- **Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA)** – VCSPB 2016 representatives, Tracey O’Neill and Dennis Torpy actively participated in CSPA and related activities to enhance connections with interstate parent organisations. Tracey O’Neill was part of the Executive of CSPA until April 2016. VCSPB hosted the CSPA’s final national meeting for the year at Catholic Leadership Centre, East Melbourne in November 2016 and will nominate two members at the VCSPB 2016 AGM to represent Victoria at a national level.

- **Principals’ Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary schools (PAVCSS)** – VCSPB (through its Executive Officer, Rachel Saliba) presented to Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools and will continue to develop relationships with Principal bodies to enable a partnership approach to improving relationships in schools and engaging parents in education.

- **Australian Catholic University (ACU)** – VCSPB, via its Executive Officer, Rachel Saliba, had the opportunity to facilitate a lecture centred on parent engagement and building social capital.

- **School Cluster Engagement Leaders (CELS) across Catholic Education Melbourne** – both VCSPB Executive Officer Rachel Saliba and council’s CECV representative Dennis Torpy, Student Wellbeing Manager with Catholic Education Melbourne attended several meetings with the Cluster Engagement Leaders in Melbourne throughout 2016 and will continue to develop relationships with such clusters and principals to enable a partnership approach to engaging parents. This includes participation in the Safe and Supportive Learning Communities Reference Group, Catholic Education Melbourne, a special committee established in 2016. The work of this group is ongoing.

- **Catholic Education Melbourne Regional Managers** – VCSPB (through its Executive Officer, Rachel Saliba) met with the regional managers and will continue to develop relationships to enable a partnership approach to engaging parents in education.

- **National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC)** – VCSPB (Tracey O’Neill and Rachel Saliba) met earlier in the year with Danielle Cronin, in her role as Deputy Director of NCEC, with respect to the Parent Connectedness Project and to re-enforce our relationship with NCEC.

- **The Greens** – VCSPB (Tracey O’Neill and Rachel Saliba) met with The Greens Member for Prahran, Sam Hibbins MP with respect to amendments to the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010 proposed by the Victorian Greens and their possible impact on Catholic education and single-sex schools. Morgan Murphy (Deputy Chair) represented VCSPB at a roundtable discussion chaired by Sam Hibbins MP around these issues. VCSPB hopes to build on these meetings to develop a relationship with the Greens and to encourage them to view Catholic education from a different perspective.

* The term parent refers to all parents of children in Catholic schools and is used to include natural, adoptive or foster parents, guardians and primary caregivers of students.
• VIT Special Needs Stakeholder Reference Group - VCSPB (through co-opted member, Genevieve Muir-Smith), attended quarterly consultation sessions to provide advice to the Institute Project Board about the stakeholder engagement strategy for the implementation of special needs requirements for registered teachers. The research project is in its final stages and VCSPB will attend the final meeting for 2016 in November.

• Royal Children’s Hospital Education Institute - VCSPB (through its Executive Officer, Rachel Saliba) met with members of the RCH Education Institute and will continue to develop relationships to enable a partnership approach to engaging parents in education.

• Good Education Group - VCSPB (through Executive Officer Rachel Saliba) met with Good Education Group and will continue to develop positive relationships to explore resources for parents, particularly in supporting parents and students in guiding them through choosing career options.

State Parent Bodies

VCSPB has previously worked with other parent groups across all education sectors, Parents Victoria and the Victorian Parents Council on projects of common interest.

This year all parent bodies discussed the SchoolMate App, launched by the DET and VCAA in 2015, and how it is being utilised by parents in understanding the curriculum. Since its launch there has been no research undertaken by VCAA regarding its usage and effectiveness in engaging parents in their children’s learning or in understanding the curriculum. VCSPB will consider this further in 2017.

Funding Catholic Schools

A core aspect of VCSPB’s guiding beliefs is the ability of parents to be able to genuinely select a school of their choice for their child. Without fair and equitable funding for Catholic schools, many parents would not be able to exercise that choice.

On 2nd July 2016, the Federal election took place.

Funding reform since the election has progressed slowly and no clear decision has yet been announced on how or when the proposed needs-based funding and review of the Gonski recommendations will occur nationally.

VCSPB, in parallel with CSPA, has closely monitored this situation and taken appropriate steps to ensure that parent voice is heard on these matters. NCEC has stated that the drive to retain funding for Catholic schools is still prominent, as broader debate continues in the media about how funding is allocated across the three education sectors.

There continues to be misinformation provided about the funding of Catholic and Independent schools.

While the concept of fairness in distribution of funding is often raised, this commonly only refers to Federal funding. The fact that State schools receive significantly higher levels of State funding, when compared to Catholic and Independent schools, is regularly not mentioned.

VCSPB is concerned by the stance taken by the Greens who appear to be opposed to funding any non-government schools. There does not appear to be any recognition by the Greens of the significant contributions that the Catholic sector makes to education in our State.

VCSPB has taken active steps during 2016 to build relationships and collaborate with all political parties on funding issues. The Funding Principles for Catholic Schools, endorsed by the NCEC and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), are: Parental choice; religious freedom; educational partnership; a fair allocative mechanism; funding equity; funding certainty; and accountability and transparency.

This document was produced after consultation with CSPA and many of the comments made by CSPA were included in the final document.

The Victorian State Government continued discussions with Executive Director of CECV, Stephen Elder throughout 2016. VCSPB acknowledges the significant contribution that Mr. Elder has made to the stability of funding for Catholic schools in our State. VCSPB has supported the work of CECV throughout this year and will continue to work collaboratively with CECV in the future to ensure parents continue to have the right to choose a Catholic education for their children.
Political Agendas

Political Interference in religious based education for the purpose of the LGBTI agenda

VCSPB have been engaged in discussions over several months with members of the Greens in understanding their proposal to amend legislation related to the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Religious Exceptions) Bill 2016 and Equal Opportunity Amendment (Equality for Students) Bill 2016.

This has been a challenge for VCSPB, as it seeks to understand and clearly represent the views of parents of children across Catholic schools. As Catholic school parents, we believe and trust our educators have compassion and respect the dignity of each and every child in their care.

Equally, VCSPB is conscious of the sensitive and political nature of this proposed amendment, and that every effort should be made to give understanding and respect to others, as well as look for ways to share accurate information.

VCSPB continues to work in collaboration with CECV on this matter and remains vigilant about possible impacts on families and children in Catholic schools.

VCSPB also remains vigilant of any ongoing political efforts that seek to divide or misinform parents and encourage them to ‘speak out’ against Catholic education.

The VCSPB has declined the offer to support the Greens’ latest proposed amendments to the legislation and in signing any support material they wish to offer to our parent body.

As the example of Jesus teaches us, VCSPB reached out and invited Greens representatives to visit our Catholic schools to see for themselves how all of our children and families are treated with respect, dignity and care.

We will continue to monitor this issue and keep our stakeholders informed of any changes or progress in this debate.

Strategic Plan 2015-2018

Our strategic plan was finalised in 2015 and strategic priorities were allocated to council members to begin working on during 2016.

Strategic Priority 9 Parent Connectedness:

Rachel Saliba and Sally Livermore began working on a project titled ‘Parent Connectedness Project’ to explore methods and best practice in engaging with stakeholders. The project is well underway following an initial scope presented to council at our meeting in March 2016. Since then, Sally Livermore resigned from her position. Sally’s role with the project was taken on by Nicole Wiseman who has contributed significantly to the research project.

Progress Reports have been submitted at each council meeting. The project is expected to conclude in March 2017 with a final submission of a summary report and recommendations for council.

Strategic Priority 12 Organisational Capacity Building:

VCSPB Council member Anastasia Ah Tong developed a skills audit document for each council member to complete. The skills audit aims to improve our awareness of each council member and their strengths as well as areas for improvement and further professional development.

The skills audit is currently being undertaken by council members via an online survey – both new and current members.

The skills audit will become a compulsory element of the nomination process for new members so VCSPB are able to identify specific skill-sets in the recruitment process prior to acceptance of nominations.

The strategic plan and priorities continue to be carried out and will be under review in early 2017 as we work through further strategic priorities to achieve our goals.

* The term parent refers to all parents of children in Catholic schools and is used to include natural, adoptive or foster parents, guardians and primary caregivers of students.
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
- 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.

## Key Objectives for 2017/18

The VCSPB will conduct a strategic planning meeting in early 2017 to review and refine the current Strategic Plan and strategic priorities moving into 2017/18. A date for this meeting will be confirmed at the final meeting for 2016.

The work of the VCSPB is guided by the four core pillars:
- Advocacy
- Relationships
- Communications
- Governance and Finance

Our key advocacy campaigns are:
- Curriculum
- Parent Engagement
- Child Safety and Wellbeing
- Catholic Identity
- Catholic School Funding

## Submissions

The VCSPB were consulted on two very important submissions during 2016.

Our submissions will be made available on our website.

- **Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority**
- **Department of Education and Training and Victorian Institute of Teaching**
  – Initial Teacher Education Reforms submission – October 2016

VCSPB were also invited to provide submissions from the following organisations:
- **Infrastructure Victoria** – Review of 30 Year Strategic Plan
- **ACARA Students with Disabilities** – inclusion of children with a disability data on MySchools website

VCSPB is currently preparing an abstract to participate in the ARACY Parent Engagement Conference on 6-8 June 2017.
Consultations and Presentations

The VCSPB participated in several focus group and consultation sessions in 2016:

- **VIT and DET** – Initial Teacher Education Reforms consultation session and participation in video.
- **VRQA** – Victorian Registrations and Qualifications Authority - Child Safe Standards review
- **CECV** – Child Safety website communication
- **CET** - Catholic Education Today magazine articles
- **PaSCO** – Parents and Schools Community Organisation - Quarterly meetings to review Teacher Registration
- **VCAA** – Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority - Quarterly meetings – updates on curriculum and Naplan
- **Safe and Supportive Learning Communities Reference Group**
- **Parent Expectations in Catholic Learning Communities (Parent Code of Conduct)**
- **Parent Engagement in Child Safe Standards Working Group**
- **ACU** – Lecture to pre-service teachers (Building Social Capital in School Communities – parent engagement)
- **Presentation to school boards** – Parish and School Boards Induction Session at Catholic Leadership Centre
- **Presentation to PAVCSS** – Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools - Parent Engagement and Parent Expectations (Behaviours) in Catholic Learning Communities.

**ACU Lecture**

In August 2016 the VCSPB had the opportunity to deliver a full day session to pre-service teachers on the development of communities and parent engagement in schools. The lecture, delivered by our Executive Officer Rachel Saliba, supervised by Chris Daicos, centred around the work of the CEM in developing Family, School and Community Partnerships. During the first session many of the resources developed by CEM were shared and discussions were had around teachers as enablers of community building and engagement. These discussions were met with plenty of enthusiasm and interest by the student teachers.

The students explored examples of schools who have engaged with parents through building social capital and who have achieved tangible results from their students.

The second session involved the exploration of the concept of leaders as hosts, rather than heroes. Utilising the text: Leadership in the Age of Complexity (The Berkana Institute), Rachel explored the student’s perceptions of leaders in schools and of themselves as leaders in the classroom and leaders/enablers of engagement with parents as partners.

The feedback received from the students was very positive. The VCSPB hopes to explore further opportunities with ACU in developing further content for future lectures based around community building (family involvement) and partnerships in learning (parent engagement).

Marketing and Communication

The VCSPB newsletter will now be developed as an online e-newsletter rather than a manual pdf version. The newsletter will still be able to be printed from the online version. This will provide further opportunity for VCSPB to broaden our reach and be more strategic in our approach to marketing campaigns, increasing the distribution of the newsletter from once a term to once a month to improve awareness and presence in schools and provide relevant and up to date information for both schools and parents.

The VCSPB website is currently under review and will be scoped by Practically Learning for a complete overhaul in design, programming and content. The scope will be completed by the end of 2016 with implementation of the new website in early 2017.

The new website aims to be more interactive and provide further resources of value to schools and their families to enable them to share in the journey of education with their children.

* The term parent refers to all parents of children in Catholic schools and is used to include natural, adoptive or foster parents, guardians and primary caregivers of students.
The VCSPB continues to advocate for parent perspective at the national level through membership of Catholic School Parents Australia. Tracey O’Neill continued to be a member of the Executive and with Dennis Torpy, represent Victorian Catholic school parents on the CSPA Council. Due to Tracey’s resignation, council will elect two new members to represent CSPA in 2017.

The CSPA continues to build connections with key stakeholders in government and within Catholic education on behalf of parents. The CSPA are currently developing a strategic plan and will continue to strengthen in recognition as the peak parent body representing Catholic parents moving into the future.

At the recent CSPA meeting held at CLC in East Melbourne, the feeling was positive and optimistic now that there is a strategic direction for the parent body. New members from other states will inject enthusiasm and ideas into the organisation and provide opportunities for change in the education landscape for parents of children in Catholic schools.

VCSPB Council members for 2017:
Morgan Murphy (Chairperson)
Anastasia Ah Tong (Deputy Chair)
Nicole Wiseman (Deputy Chair)
Alexandra Briggs
Rhyannon Elliott
Dennis Torpy (CECV and CSPA representative)
Rachel Saliba (Executive Officer and CSPA representative)

VCSPB will induct new member, Jennifer Griffiths in March 2017, following her commencement as the new Parent Engagement Officer in the Diocese of Sandhurst.

VCSPB will welcome new members during 2017 following nominations from each diocese.

As I complete my final duties as Chair of the VCSPB, I wish to convey my sincere thanks to my fellow Council members, past and present.

It has been a wonderful privilege and learning journey to work with the VCSPB and always endeavouring to give a true representation to the voices of our parents across our many wonderful Catholic schools in Victoria.

My thanks also to the Directors in each of Victoria’s four diocese for their unwavering support of me and readiness to collaborate with the parent body to enhance Catholic education, most importantly, for our students.

Yours sincerely,

Tracey O’Neill - Chair, VCSPB