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The Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB) was established at the start of 2006 with the support of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) and the endorsement of the Archbishop of Melbourne and the Bishops of Ballarat, Sandhurst and Sale.

Its purpose is to:
• provide a forum to represent parents in Victorian Catholic schools
• promote parents as partners in education with the school, Church and the community
• promote the principles of Catholic education in collaboration with the Diocesan Bishops
• promote Catholic schools as schools of first choice for Catholic families.

It would be appreciated if a copy of this Bulletin could be provided to the chairperson of your school board or parent group.

From the Chair

It is very hard to believe that there is only one week left in Term 4 – where did the year go? 2013 was my daughter’s last year in primary school and it seems like only yesterday that she started Prep. Obviously, there is a great deal of excitement about starting secondary school, but for me (as is so often the case for parents) this is tinged with a little bit of anxiety for the journey ahead. How quickly those school years go by and yet they play such an important role in making our children the wonderful young people they will become.

Parent Engagement

In early November, I was invited to attend the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) Wellbeing & Community Partnerships Conference – Innovate. Create. Relate. During this two-day conference the attendees dedicated their time to important issues such as family engagement and ensuring that our education system is providing children with the skills that employers need. As a parent representative it was a great experience to be surrounded by educators who are very dedicated to engaging parents so that the educational and social outcomes for students are the best that they can be. I know sometimes it can feel like parent engagement is just the latest buzz word in education, but at this conference there were 370 delegates (over 90% of those were teachers and principals) and I was overwhelmed by their commitment to parent engagement.

As parents, we need to respond to our school’s attempts to engage us and to spread the word to other parents of the huge benefits that can be obtained for families and students. Helping children with their homework or encouraging them in their study does not require a full-time commitment but it will make a huge difference to their schooling. As parents we have the skills that employers need. Innovation can be exciting, but like all new journeys it can also be a little scary too. No one wants a system that takes unacceptable risks with our children’s education, but equally as parents we want our children to obtain work that they enjoy and allows them to have a good life. The model of education in the western world was not created with the digital and global age of today in mind; it was created for a very different world.

A number of presentations are available online on the Catholic Education Office Melbourne website. The conference brought together international speakers, academics and practitioners to engage in diverse conversations and thinking about leading innovative practices in wellbeing and family–community engagement. Over two days, this conference offered an exciting opportunity to connect, network and explore contemporary approaches to educational innovation. Through a variety of workshops showcasing wellbeing and community partnership initiatives from Catholic primary and secondary schools across the Archdiocese of Melbourne, participants had an opportunity to discover how innovative ideas can inspire transformational change and be sustained.

Related resources:

The other important issue that came out of the conference was the need for there to be innovation in education. Across the world there is a huge (and growing) mismatch between the qualifications that students obtain and the skills needed by employers. A very strong case was made at this conference for educators to find ways to be more innovative so that students develop skills that employers need. Innovation can be exciting, but like all new journeys it can also be a little scary too. No one wants a system that takes unacceptable risks with our children’s education, but equally as parents we want our children to obtain work that they enjoy and allows them to have a good life. The model of education in the western world was not created with the digital and global age of today in mind; it was created for a very different world.

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Our experiences of education and the job market when we left school are very different, but we should not let our fear of change hold us back from innovation for the benefit of our children. I believe that we (parents and educators in partnership) need to continue to work towards an education model that makes education a meaningful and useful experience for our children. I ask you as parents to embrace this change so our children are fully equipped for a future which is constantly changing and where innovation occurs almost on a daily basis.

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) launch

In our last Bulletin, I confirmed that the first AGM of CSPA would take place in October. Patricia Palman and I are the two Victorian Council Members for CSPA. The AGM took place in Sydney and was timed to coincide with the meeting of the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC). It was a great evening and a truly historic moment as CSPA is the first national parent body for the Catholic education sector. All states and the ACT have Council Members on the CSPA. The NT is still in the process of establishing a parent body for the Catholic education sector. All states and the ACT have Council Members on the CSPA. The NT is still in the process of establishing a parent body and is anticipated that once established they will also become Council Members. It was truly gratifying to have NCEC members and a number of parent representatives from around NSW present at our launch publicly supporting CSPA and demonstrating the value that they place on the unique Catholic school parent perspective.

Anyone who has tried to bring together people from all states and territories to achieve a common aim will know that the path to establishing a national body is not always easy. There have been challenges for CSPA along the way, but I believe that we succeeded because of our faith and a shared passion for parent leadership and advocacy in Catholic education. All Council Members recognise that we all bring something valuable to the table and hold a piece of our collective wisdom. We are all committed to ensuring that our parent voice informs the decisions of the Federal Government, NCEC and the Church’s mission for Catholic education. This is important because it means that we, as parents, will continue to be able to exercise a real choice about the type of school that we send our children to while ensuring that our children’s spiritual needs are met.

CSPA will be a body that works within Catholic education and with all the external stakeholders to achieve outcomes for the common good of all parents and students. Together we will ensure that our parent voice is heard nationally.

Finally, as this is the last newsletter for 2013, I wanted to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy Christmas with all the blessings of the Christmas season.

Tracey O’Neill

CSPA Inaugural Council Members

Chair: Tony O’Byrne

Federation of Parents & Friends in Catholic Schools Qld
- Karl McKenzie (Townsville) #
- Carmel Nash (Brisbane) *

NSW Council of Catholic School Parents
- Trevor Kellam (Woollongong) #
- Danielle Cronin (Sydney) *

Parents & Friends Federation of WA inc.
- Joe Monterosso (Perth) #
- Siobhan Allen (Perth)

Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities (SA)
- Ann Bliss (Adelaide) *
- Kylie Ind (Mt Gambier)

Tasmanian Catholic Schools Parents Council
- Brendan McManus (Hobart) #
- Greg Boon (Launceston)

Victoria Catholic Schools Parent Body
- Tracey O’Neill (Daylesford) #
- Patricia Palman (Melbourne) *

Catholic School Parents Canberra & Goulburn
- Bob Brady (Queanbeyan) #
- Tim Smith (Canberra) *

Back row (l–r): Karl McKenzie, Joe Monterosso, Greg Boon, Trevor Kellam, Tim Smith

Middle row (l–r): Patricia Palman, Danielle Cronin, Ann Bliss, Kylie Ind, Bob Brady

Front row (l–r): Tracey O’Neill, Siobhan Allen, Carmel Nash

#Denotes Chair of their State/Territory parent body
*Denotes Executive Director or Executive Officer of their State/Territory parent body
Parent Engagement in Action: A practical guide and toolkit for schools

A new resource for schools, Parent Engagement in Action: A practical guide and toolkit for schools was launched by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) on 30 October 2013.

Three years in the making, this resource is an exciting development for Catholic school communities. It is a leading edge resource that enables school leaders to develop a clear picture of what parent engagement looks like, and presents a process for establishing effective reflective practices that focus on building relationships, and nurture links to learning.

This new resource, based on the experience of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships Family–School Partnerships (SSNP FSP) initiative, supported by national and international research, guides school leaders through a process of reflection and evaluation focusing on parental engagement across four key focus areas: Relationships, Learning, Leadership, and Reflection.

The resource consists of two components, the Guide and the Toolkit, which are framed around two key aspects of any endeavour to improve outcomes for students:

• what is working well
• how to get even better.

The Guide provides a framework and reflection activities designed to assist school communities to deepen their understanding of the role of parents as partners in learning. The Toolkit provides links to School Improvement Reports, and a collection of new survey and dialogue tools developed to encourage schools to use existing school data in new ways, as well as collect and analyse new information to support school improvement.

The Guide and Toolkit are available online on the CEOM website. For more information please contact the CEOM Wellbeing & Community Partnerships Unit on 9267 0228.

Social inclusion in education – Meeting Point

‘When we attempt to measure children’s wellbeing, what we really seek to know is whether children are adequately clothed and housed and fed and protected, whether their circumstances are such that they are likely to become all they are capable of becoming or whether they are disadvantaged in ways that make it difficult or impossible for them to participate fully in the life and opportunities around them. Above all, we seek to know whether children feel loved, cherished, special and supported, within the family and the community, and whether the family and the community are being supported in this task by public policy and resources.’


In his encyclical Caritas in Veritate (Love in Truth), Pope Benedict XVI argues that ‘charity’, or love, is fundamental to Catholic social teaching and that love cannot be limited to the private spheres of family and friendship. Charity is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22: 36–40). It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbour; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones).

(Benedict XVI, 2009, n. 2, Caritas in Veritate (Love in Truth) (continued page 4)
Catholic Social Teaching promotes a vision of a just society that is grounded in scripture and in the wisdom gathered from the experience of the Christian community as it responded to social justice issues through history. As Church institutions, Catholic schools are called to witness in word and action the key principles of Catholic Social Teaching. These are:

**Dignity of the Human Person**

Made in the image of God, every person has an equal human dignity which gives rise to inalienable rights. People are more important than material possessions and must never be treated as instruments for the benefit of other persons.

**The Common Good**

Collectively, and as individuals, we are interdependent and responsible for all of humanity. We must work for the development of all humankind and an equitable distribution of goods and services. The rights and duties of individuals must be harmonised under the common good.

**Solidarity**

Social by nature, human beings can only achieve their full potential when they work in collaboration with others. Solidarity involves standing in unity with those in need and speaking up for their rights.

**Subsidiarity**

The principle of subsidiarity places responsibility as close as possible to the grassroots. Decisions or policy setting should be made at the closest possible level to those affected by the initiative.

**Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

We must put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first

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**Meeting Point**

Meeting Point recently celebrated their 15 years with a roundtable gathering of community and education sector representatives, including the VCSPB.

Meeting Point is a joint initiative of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne, the Victorian Independent Education Union, the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, the Brigidine Secondary Schools Council, Catholic Social Services Victoria and the Australian Catholic University. It focuses on raising awareness of the challenges facing low-income families as they deal with the realities of the costs of family life and education. This often finds expression in questions of inclusion and, at times, feelings of exclusion from full participation in school life.

Within a framework of inclusiveness and the promotion of personal and community wellbeing, Meeting Point has the following broad intentions:

- To encourage the Catholic community, through its agencies and along with Catholic education, to meet together and reflect on their mission to serve the most disadvantaged and vulnerable families within the community.
- To develop and communicate an awareness of affordability issues within Catholic education and to explore the relationship between this and accessibility of Catholic education for Catholic families as schools of first choice.
- To encourage schools to adopt a comprehensive approach to accessibility that recognises the interrelation between financial management, contemporary curriculum, social inclusion and pastoral wellbeing, policies and practices.
To explore the relationship between government policies and their impact on the wellbeing of students and their families, to raise awareness regarding such impacts, and to engage in advocacy that addresses the inadequacies of such policies.

To provide an opportunity for schools to work collaboratively with families to determine their needs as they experience them, particularly for those families from a low-income background.

To identify aspects of best practice within schools as they respond to the needs of families and to share this with other schools.

To identify agencies and institutions within local communities which are available to work with schools to address family needs.

To become more familiar, through collaboration with community agencies, with ways of accessing and providing current information to families to assist them to maximise income support e.g. utility hardship schemes.

To develop a richer understanding of the concept of schools as community hubs and core social centres.

Catholic schools ‘are committed to creating inclusive, engaging and mutually respectful environments where all members of the school community flourish’ (CEOM 2010, p 6). Such a commitment necessitates a broad agenda. It covers issues that include:

- establishing a climate of welcome and a culture of wellbeing
- attending to access and affordability
- focusing on inclusive leadership within the school
- ensuring quality teaching and learning that builds in achievement for all students
- providing a wellbeing framework and action plans that support students and that works in partnership with family and community
- valuing the rich and diverse experiences of all members of the community.

Socially just schools are inclusive schools. In an overall sense, inclusive schooling is about understanding and responding to the different potential, needs and life situations of students. The Melbourne Declaration charges all school sectors to commit to:

- ensuring ‘that socio-economic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes’
- reducing ‘the effect of other sources of disadvantage such as disability, homelessness, refugee status and remoteness’
- ensuring ‘that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity’ (p. 7).

Like all sectors of education, Catholic schools face the challenge of socially inclusive schooling which is to add value not only through narrowly defined performance criteria but also through broadly focused recognition of achievement and enhanced personal and community wellbeing. Schools need to be places where students and teachers feel they belong, where they get a sense of achievement in their lives, and where they are recognised and connected.

A beginning point in addressing the challenge of inclusive schooling is to reflect on the following questions:

What are the practices and structures within the school that best support and encourage full participation in education?

What are the practices and structures within the school that might deter, discourage or exclude some students from full participation in education?

(continued page 6)
The title of the Statement is *Lazarus at Our Gate: A critical moment in the fight against world poverty*. The Statement calls on the Australian Government to stand in solidarity with our neighbours around the world by renewing the commitment to address global poverty.

Bishop Christopher Saunders, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, said, 'Australia has a new government. Australia has taken a seat on the United Nations Security Council. And next year, Australia will host the G-20 economic summit in Brisbane. Our nation has a historic opportunity to be a force for peace and generosity in the global response to poverty.'

In the Statement, *Lazarus at Our Gate*, the Catholic Bishops call on Australia to demonstrate the leadership it lays claim to by making a generous commitment to the aid budget and to keep its promise by living up to that commitment.
School music education in Victoria

A report *Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools* by the Victorian Parliament’s Education and Training Committee has found a powerful case for ensuring that music education plays a more central role in Victorian schools.

The Committee’s Chair in a Media Release (12 November 2013) stated:

‘Music education should be an essential part of every young person’s education. Not only do they gain enjoyment and reward from making and listening to music, but research also shows that learning music can lead to improved student engagement at school and enhanced social wellbeing.

‘While the Committee found that some Victorian schools provide exceptional musical experiences, not all schools are operating at this level. Unfortunately, many Victorian students in the public education system appear to be missing out on a sequential and in-depth music education, particularly during the primary school years.

‘We owe it to all young people to ensure that they can fully experience the joy and value of learning music.

The Committee’s report provides a framework for ensuring that all Victorian students have the opportunity to experience a meaningful music education at school.

Key recommendations include:

- a state-wide strategy to guide the future delivery of school music education in Victoria
- a promotion plan to ensure that school leaders and teachers understand the importance and benefits of a quality music education
- a music education guide to support schools to deliver a quality music education
- increased education, training and support for teachers, particularly at the primary school level
- support for secondary schools without an instrumental music program to start a program.

The Truth, Justice and Healing Council was established by the Catholic Church to help the Church fully embrace the Australian Government’s Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Council represents dioceses, archdioceses and religious congregations from across Australia before the Royal Commission. Hearings are scheduled to start in Sydney on 9 December 2013.

‘...This week the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry* will deliver its findings after an 18 month Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations. Like the Egan case, we can expect the Inquiry to be very damming of the Catholic Church.

‘At times like this it is easy to feel defensive, because as with everything, the full truth is never told, but this is an important, necessary process for the Church. We must be open and humble in explaining the past, our approaches, our disposition, and we must admit our failings. This is a time for the Church to demonstrate its maturity and to show respect to the people damaged by clerical sex abuse.

‘The truth needs to be told and victims need to tell their story. The Church will also have an opportunity to fully explain itself and to demonstrate the vast improvements and commitment it has made to safeguarding children.

‘The months ahead won’t be easy for anyone, particularly people who have been abused. Everyone will be impacted – victims telling their stories, victims wanting, but unable to tell their stories, and of course their families and friends. In all cases this is a traumatic experience, and unfortunately for many it will re-open wounds that are so very difficult to heal.

‘When the Truth Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) was first established 12 months ago I said the Royal Commission was a crucial time for the Catholic Church. We made a commitment then and we continue today to be honest and open with the interest of victims and their families always our number one concern.

‘I am confident the Church is making significant improvements in safeguarding children. The people working in the Church today are doing everything they can to heal the wounds and make the Church a safe, and loving place for everyone.

‘The issue of child sex abuse must remain a high priority not only for the Church and other Institutions, but also in domestic settings where the majority of abuse occurs. I say this not to avert attention from the responsibilities of the Catholic Church, but for the safety and wellbeing of all children throughout the world.

‘Pope Francis said last week that as a Church we must yearn for something deeper. “A communion that makes us able to enter into the joy and the sorrow of others and sincerely make them our own.” Pope Francis.

‘As more stories of clerical sex abuse are told over the next few months we share the sorrow of victims. Our hope is they will receive comfort in knowing the Church is listening, is sorry and is doing something about it.’

Francis Sullivan, CEO, TJHC.


The Catholic Church in Australia, in its submissions to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and in its communications with both the Catholic and broader communities has made a statement of commitment. Read the Catholic Church commitment here.

Focus, faith and a commitment to working collaboratively

As we draw to the end of 2013 and my year as Chair of the VCSPB, I wanted to reflect on the many blessings that we have had during this year. For me this year has been a very busy one with some highs and some lows. Fortunately the highs outnumber the lows. It is easy to ‘over think’ the negatives, but I try to focus on the positive and on the many amazing people that I (like you all) have in my life.

As a Council we have achieved a great deal (see 2013 Annual Report) in what sometimes seemed like an impossible mission, but focus, faith and a commitment to working collaboratively meant that we achieved our goals. We may not have achieved them in the form that we set them, but the essence of working collaboratively is being able to compromise and being focused on the ‘end game’ not the little skirmishes in between. There are many paths to the same goal and sometimes the goal needs to be adapted to ensure that it benefits a wider group, but that does not diminish the goal achieved.

I would like to thank all our Council Members in 2013 and to everyone who has supported the VCSPB. We need to say farewell to Matthew McIntyre who has been a Council Member for 6 years and to Liz Grogan who is commencing maternity leave – thank you both for all your efforts and the many contributions you have made to the VCSPB. 2014 will see some new Council Members (more about that in 2014), some new goals and some new challenges. I am hopeful and optimistic for the future and to all the great things that we will achieve in the year ahead.

Tracey O’Neill