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Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Per email eewr.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

Inquiry into teaching and Learning – maximising Australia's investment in schools

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) is pleased to provide this submission to the Senate Committee inquiry into teaching and learning in Australia's schools.

NCEC represents all 1704 Catholic schools in Australia. Catholic schools enroll about 720,000 students, one-fifth of all school students in the country. Catholic schools employ over 83,000 staff.

NCEC is responsible to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference for the development of national policy for Catholic schools, and for negotiations on behalf of Catholic schools and the Bishops Conference with the Australian Government and with Commonwealth agencies and instrumentalities.

Research summary – the links between school funding and student learning outcomes
Research has linked a broad range of factors to key educational outcomes and, in particular, improving student educational performance. The most influential of these are:

- *Teacher quality* – a number of studies have found that the single most important factor affecting student learning is the in-school impact of the quality of its teachers.[1]

[1] For example, see Wright, S.; Horn, S. & Sanders, W. (1997). 'Teacher and Classroom Context Effects on Student Achievement: Implications for Teacher Evaluation', *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 11, pp. 57-67.

- *School leadership* – research into leadership, organisational learning and student outcomes has found that 'shared learning, empowerment and leadership are pre-requisites for school improvement'.

- *School governance* – it has been found that students perform significantly better in schools that have autonomy in process and personnel decisions (especially staffing decisions and instructional approaches).[2] A recent Principal Autonomy Research Project[3] further concludes that there is a positive relationship between school autonomy and student outcomes when school autonomy involves authority and responsibility over strategies that directly impact on what occurs in the classroom and/or in support of the learner.[4]

- *The presence of an effective non-government schooling sector alongside government schools* – an OECD study has shown that choice of schooling between government and non-government sectors results in greatly improved academic outcomes, and that this effect operates on both government and non-government schools.[5]

- *Parental involvement/engagement in their children's schooling* – the children of parents who spend time with their children discussing their studies, attending meetings at schools, ensuring that homework is done have substantially better schooling achievement.[6]

- *Socio-economic background of the student* – there is evidence that the socio-economic status of a student's family influences the student's learning outcomes, although the size of this effect varies considerably across nations.[7] Students also tend to perform better academically if they are in schools which have a higher average socio-economic status than their families.[8]

- *Geographic location* – research has found that students in Australia in rural and regional areas have lower education performance than those in urban areas (for example, they are less likely to remain at school after the minimum leaving age).[9]

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[2] Hanushek, E and Woessmann, L (2010), *The economics of International differences in educational achievement*, Working Paper 15949, National Bureau of Economic Research. Also, see Woessmann, L., Luedemann, E., Schuetz, G., & West, M. R. (2007). *School Accountability, Autonomy, Choice, and the Level of Student Achievement: International Evidence from PISA 2003*. Paris: OECD Directorate for Education.

[3] Silins, H. and Mulford, B. 2007 'Leadership and school effectiveness and improvement' in Townsend, T. (Ed.) *International Handbook of School Effectiveness and Improvement*, Springer, Netherlands.

[4] Education transformations 2007, *Principal Autonomy Research Project*, Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

[5] Woessmann, L., Luedemann, E., Schuetz, G., & West, M. R. (2007). *School Accountability, Autonomy, Choice, and the Level of Student Achievement: International Evidence from PISA 2003*. Paris: OECD Directorate for Education.

[6] For example, see Bradley, R. H., & Corwyn, R. F. (2002). 'Socioeconomic status and child development'. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 371-400.

[7] Haahr, J. H., Nielsen, T. K., Hansen, M. E., & Jakobsen, S. T. (2005). *Explaining Student Performance: Evidence from the international PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS surveys*: Danish Technological Institute.

[8] OECD. (2010). *PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming Social Background – Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes* (Vol. II). Paris: The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

[9] Welch, A., Helme, S., & Lamb, S. (2007). 'Rurality and Inequality in Education: The Australian Experience'. In R. Teese, S. Lamb & M. Duru-Bellat (Eds.), *International Studies in Educational Inequality, Theory and Policy* (Vol. Two). Dordrecht: Springer.

Meanwhile, the distinct relationship between school resourcing and educational outcomes has proved difficult to isolate.[10] This serves to highlight that, although the quantum of funding provided to schools is clearly an important 'enabler' for improving student learning outcomes, the actual effect of resourcing on outcomes is mediated by a host of other conditions.[11]

Specifically, research findings provide considerable insight into management, governance and allocation mechanisms that influence the likely effectiveness of resourcing in improving educational outcomes. For example:

- Resources will only improve student learning outcomes to the extent they are directed toward policies and initiatives with demonstrated effectiveness. By way of example, the research indicates that extra funding would be more effective if it were directed toward developing 'better' teachers rather than 'more' teachers.

- Resources will also be more effective when provided in an environment in which school authorities and teaching staff are able to make key decisions and especially tailor learning strategies to the specific needs of their students. Similarly, additional resourcing will be more effective if the school environment engenders parental commitment and engagement.

- Resources provided to a school will 'go further' where the school has the flexibility to manage these resources directly. That is, schools employ and deploy staff, purchase materials, manage repairs and maintenance resulting in overall lower costs.

- In order to promote *equity* in outcomes, resources need to be directed at students with the greatest educational needs. Resources will be most effective if they are allocated using the best available information to identify student and school needs.

The Inquiry's terms of reference

(a) The effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools

Managing teacher performance and professional development is critical in improving student learning outcomes.

Research and reflection on current experience in Catholic schools shows that effective classroom practices can be characterised as follows.

- Use of an inquiry based, action learning approach to improve teaching and learning in a sustainable manner
- Whole school learning and teaching priorities aligned

[10] For example, see Dowling, A. (2008). 'Output Measurement in Education', *Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation*, ACER.
[11] Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: a Synthesis of over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement*. London New York: Routledge.

- External data (for example, NAPLAN) analysed to determine a whole school focus
- A curriculum improvement plan written and implemented and monitored
- The creation of a "professional learning community" approach in order to enhance teacher knowledge of content, pedagogy and students and drive whole school improvement
- Use of mentoring and "shoulder to shoulder" professional learning at the point of instruction to enhance and embed effective pedagogy
- Ensuring that school practicum placements provide effective quality supervision for teachers in training
- Practical mentoring support for beginning teachers
- Use of specialist consultants to create professional learning opportunities to enhance and support teacher knowledge of content, pedagogy and students
- Apply the results of a range of research in organisational leadership and school capacity building
- Teachers setting high academic expectations for their students
- Targeting system priority areas
- Strategic use of second wave, bridging-the-gap, intervention teaching/ learning approaches with targeted students.

It is NCEC's view that Catholic school systems (96% of Catholic schools are members of such systems) provide an over-arching professional structure that maximises support for teaching and learning, ensures high level accountability and fosters constructive innovation.

(b) The structure and governance of school administration - local and central - and its impact on teaching and learning

A number of recent studies have linked school autonomy to positive academic performance.

(i) Hanushek and Woessman (2010) reviewed the economic literature on international differences in educational achievement, and found that "students perform significantly better in schools that had autonomy in process and personal decisions". Such decisions include those relating to budget allocations within schools, teacher recruitment and instructional approaches. While the study found that "in some areas, autonomy is negatively associated with student achievement in systems that do not have external exit exams", this association became positive when combined with external-exam systems.

(ii) Woessman et al. (2007) conducted country-level and school-level analysis of student achievement using data from the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) (2003) with a focus on the impact of school autonomy. Both levels of analysis found positive impacts on educational performance where there is school autonomy over staffing decisions. The school-level analysis also found school autonomy over teacher recruitment to be positively correlated with performance. In addition, it concluded that "school

autonomy over the budget, over salaries, and over course contents is more beneficial when measures of school accountability, especially external exit exams, hold schools accountable for their decisions".

(iii) Silins and Mulford (2004) conducted research on leadership, organisational learning and student outcomes and found that "shared learning, empowerment and leadership are pre-requisites for school improvement". This research, and other papers, contributed to the conclusion in the recent Principal Autonomy Research Project (2007) that there is a positive relationship between school autonomy and student outcomes when school autonomy involves authority and responsibility over "strategies that directly impact on what occurs in the classroom and/or in support of the learner".

(iv) Woessman and Schuetz (2006) have analysed efficiency and equity in European education and training systems. Their analysis suggests that autonomy, coupled with external exams, led to improvements in efficiency – i.e. efficiency was improved where central standards and monitoring processes were established but individual schools determined how best to meet such standards.

Greater school autonomy and self-management is also associated with more efficient operating costs. In a review of the influence of autonomy on school performance in England, Levačić (1995) found evidence linking local management of schools to cost-efficiency. Local management supports cost efficiency through the opportunity it provides for schools to purchase inputs at a lower cost, dependent on their specific circumstances, and by allowing resource mixes that were not possible or readily attainable under previous more centralised arrangements.

The majority of Catholic schools in Australia are members of State-level block funding arrangements, where funds and resources are pooled and allocated on the basis of locally-assessed need. These arrangements capture and express a key Catholic social justice principle: subsidiarity (where decisions are made at the lowest most appropriate level) balanced by solidarity (an active commitment to the common good).

(c) The influence of family members in supporting the rights of children to receive a quality education

NCEC is convinced that governments should continue to support (through their funding arrangements for nongovernment schools and their system management structures for government schools) active parental choice of school. The national and international evidence (examples of which are quoted in this submission) confirms that parental choice of school is a "tide that raises all boats", improving student learning outcomes across the board. NCEC rejects the impression often created in the media that parental choice of school is socially divisive or is a matter of social privilege. Parent choice of school should continue to be available by right.

There is a rich body of research showing that close partnerships between families and schools can improve educational outcomes for students and contribute to positive outcomes for both school students and parents.

For example, Catholic school parents have an expectation that their children's education is focused on the growth of the child/student cognitively, physically, socially and spiritually. NCEC believes that, as a school's primary function is the development of the whole person, schools must necessarily work in close connection with families and communities. Catholic schools embrace the parent-school partnership and endeavour to offer formal and informal environments where parents' involvement and engagement are encouraged and welcomed through high quality parent-teacher relationships, parent associations and school boards.

In practice, parent engagement goes further than involvement, and various programs have been introduced within Catholic dioceses so that schools are able to reflect on, explore different strategies, and develop more effective community-parent-school partnerships. Initiatives such as the Australian Government-supported Family-School Partnerships Framework have also been embraced by Catholic schools.

Further specific research evidence includes the following.

(i) Houtenville and Smith Conway (2008) [12] found that parent involvement had a positive impact on student achievement, and that 'the magnitude of the effect of parental effort is also substantial – along the order of an additional four to six years of parental education or more than $1,000 in per-pupil spending'.

(ii) Jeynes (2005) [13] conducted a meta-analysis of the impact of parent involvement and student achievement, drawing from 77 studies. The study concluded that 'academic achievement score distribution or range of scores for children whose parents were highly involved in their education was substantially higher than that of their counterparts whose parents were less involved'.

(iii) Henderson and Mapp (2002) [14] examined 51 studies on parent and community involvement and its role on student achievement, and found a 'positive and convincing' relationship between family involvement and academic achievement irrespective of race, age and socio-economic status. The analysis found that community involvement generated benefits for schools and students also.

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[12] Houtenville, A and Smith Conway, K. 2008, 'Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement', *The Journal of Human Resources,* XLIII(2)

[13] Jeynes, W. H. 2005, *Parental involvement and student achievement: A meta-analysis*, Harvard Family Research Project, Cambridge, (see http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/publications_resources)

[14] Henderson, A and Mapp, K 2002, 'A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family and community connections on student achievement', *National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools,* Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

(d) The adequacy of tools available for teachers to create and maintain an optimal learning environment

One major challenge facing Australian educators is how best to harness the power of electronic media in teaching and learning.

Catholic school authorities have been at the forefront of developing new fibre networks to schools to enhance connectability and speed of data transfer.

A more significant challenge is the development of appropriate e-learning materials and pedagogies that can capitalise on the new physical connectivity.

A further significant challenge for Australian schools is to understand the current dimensions of the centralisation/decentralisation debate that has characterised the provision of schooling in Australia since early colonial times. The degree to which the physical or geographical isolation of schools can be fully ameliorated by technology is still a moot point. Successful teaching and learning still hinges on the relationship between teachers and their students. Catholic school authorities need the flexibility (via appropriate regulations and employment relations agreements) to ensure that quality teaching staff can be attracted to all schools.

(e) Factors influencing the selection, training, professional development, career progression and retention of teachers in the Australian education system

NCEC remains unconvinced that the current singular focus on ATAR scores and ATAR scores alone to select among school-leaver applicants for teacher education programs at university is sound. While certainly a helpful indicator, the ATAR score is not a good predictor, either of success in university study or of success in any chosen profession to follow.

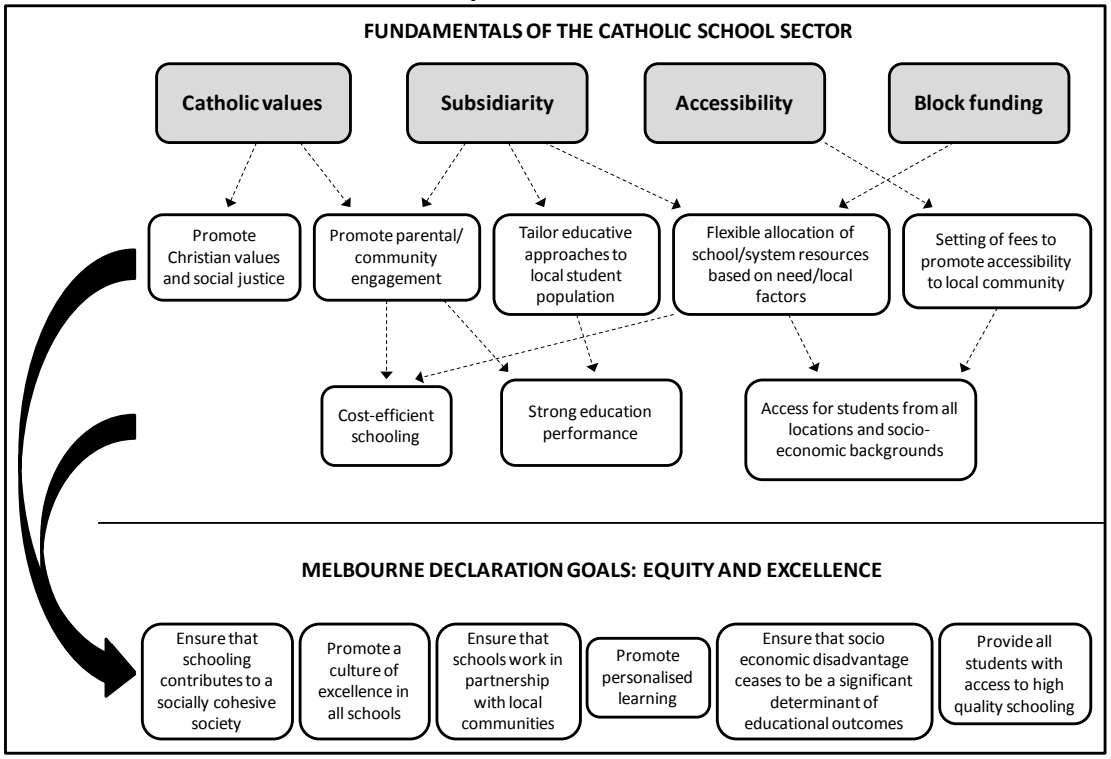
NCEC believes that, given acceptable subject mastery and the possession of a proper pedagogical skill set, the main ingredients in making a successful teacher are a positive and constructive professional learning environment at school level, and a personal capacity to relate effectively with children and young people. Successful teaching is essentially relational.

NCEC suggests that a range of assessment procedures for prospective teacher education students would be appropriate.

Summary

The following schema indicates, in NCEC's view, the way in which Catholic schools, and other effective schools and school systems, harness and focus their resources to achieve good learning outcomes and to maximise the investment that so many – governments, parents and families, teachers and students themselves – make in school education.

Figure 1: Links between Catholic school sector fundamentals and education performance



Yours sincerely

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