



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Catholic Education Commission NSW
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: NSW

Summary

The Catholic school sets out to develop the potential of all students irrespective of their abilities, interests and needs.

CECNSW advises that employability skills provide only a necessary but not sufficient skill set for contemporary learners.

Effective teaching for learning is best realised through a culture of collaboration that supports 'de-privatised' and data informed practices by teachers supported by school based Leaders of Learning

School improvement frameworks must be determined at a system (school authority) level, inclusive of parent and community input.

CECNSW recommends a focus on Fullan's 'drivers that work', being capacity building, group work, instruction and systemic solutions.

To achieve learning gains, CECNSW advocates intentional systemic interventions by school authorities which:

- acknowledge the centrality of teaching and the development of teachers and the critical importance of school leadership;
- expand boundaries of schooling with respect to pre- and post-school services;
- support schools as diverse and inclusive learning communities;
- network and support schools in the context of system-wide improvement priorities;
- promote a holistic model of schooling, which combines cognitive, instrumental, affective, spiritual and psychomotor purposes;
- recognise the importance of the affective domain, school culture and purpose including, where relevant, a school's religious purpose, to the establishment of each school's learning culture; and

- build parent and community support for schooling.

Conversely, CECNSW advises against:

- devalues systemic approaches to school administration and educational leadership;
- relies on a narrow test(ing)-based approach to the monitoring of whole-of-school effectiveness;
- is driven by the search for single factor/methodologies/interventions to 'drive good practice and continuous improvement' (the search for the 'magic bullet');
- adopts any actions that derogate from a school's (or system of schools) unifying ethos and purpose including, as appropriate, its Religious purpose.

Main submission

Question 1

A. Context for Success

- A.1. The Catholic Education Commission New South Wales (CECNSW) approaches this question through the lens of 592 schools and 255,617 students, their families, and 20,000 head count of teachers.
- A.2. Effective schools are in essence purposeful and well-functioning communities directed by a shared moral purpose.
- A.3. The key Church documents which speak to the educational purpose of Catholic schooling, against which their educational success may be judged, are:
- Declaration on Christian Education (1965)
 - The Catholic School (1977)
 - The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (1997)
 - Educating Together in Catholic Schools (2007)
 - Educating in Intercultural Dialogue in the Catholic School (2013)
 - Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion (2014)

In summary, Catholic schools are to be 'educational communities where learning thrives on the integration between research, thinking and life experience' (Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion, II)

These Church documents speak to an educational anthropology for schooling, which itself provides criteria against which the success of a school might be best assessed.

- A.4. In this context the Catholic School is built on the following indices of school capacity:

- Knowledge, skills, dispositions of individuals;
- Professional community;
- Program coherence;
- Technical resources; and
- Shared leadership,

with all elements integrated through a shared moral purpose.

A.5. Taken holistically, the Catholic anthropology for the assessment of a successful school or system of schools focuses on the following criteria:

- Characterised as an educating community;
- Aimed at forming persons;
- Supported by professionally formed teachers;
- Motivated by a shared mission;
- Focused on creating increasingly deeper personal relationships;
- Founded on the relationship between school and family(ies);
- Supports transformation;
- Where people learn how to live their lives;
- Values learning; and
- Develops in students the necessary critical skills to succeed as active citizens.

Recommendation:

A.6. Consistent with the criteria for success outlined above, the Catholic school sets out to develop the potential of all students irrespective of their abilities, interests and needs.

To realise the learning potential of this anthropology for a successful school, three critical enablers must be present:

- (i) access to equitable, needs-based funding;
- (ii) systemic support services; and
- (iii) a standards-based and integrated architecture for schooling in respect of each of:
 - Teacher Accreditation
 - School Registration
 - Curriculum Standards

- Assessment Standards.

B. What capabilities, skills and knowledge should students learn at school to prepare them for the future?

B.1. The Catholic anthropology of schooling speaks to the enduring purposes of schools. For each generation, schooling has been and will continue to be a preparation for the future.

B.2. As stated in *Educating Today and Tomorrow* (op.cit.), 'Schools are places where people learn to live their lives'.

B.3. In terms of educational theory, this means that the affective domain is as important as the cognitive domain in preparing students for the future.

B.4. That is, successful learning is not just equivalent to content assimilation but is an opportunity for self-education, improvement and the common good.

B.5. Consequently, schools, particularly Catholic schools, need to address the following principles for successful schooling in order to prepare students for the future:

- Respect for individual dignity and uniqueness;
- Promotion of opportunities for young people to grow and develop their abilities and talents;
- Promotion of a balanced focus on the cognitive, affective, social, professional, ethical and spiritual dimensions of a holistic education;
- Encouragement for every student to develop their talents, in a climate of cooperation and solidarity;
- Research as a rigorous foundation for teaching; and
- Respect for ideas, openness to dialogue and the ability to interact and work together in a spirit of freedom and care.

B.6. To operationalise these principles for the purpose of preparing children and young people for their future, the following elements of successful schooling should be addressed:

(i) Capabilities

CECNSW endorses the continued use and development of the ACARA General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum.

These General Capabilities are:

- Literacy;
- Numeracy;

- Information and Communication Technology;
- Critical and Creative Thinking;
- Personal and Social Capability;
- Ethical Understanding; and
- Intercultural Understanding.

As part of this list, CECNSW recommends particular emphasis on:

- Emotional intelligence;
- Empathy;
- Spiritual awareness; and
- Psychomotor capability.

There is an increasing body of research evidence that spirituality enhances wellbeing and resilience in children and young persons (vis Kim, S. and Esquivel, G. B. (2011), 'Adolescent spirituality and resilience: Theory, research, and educational practices'. Psychol. Schs., 48: 755–765. doi:10.1002/pits.20582)

Recommendation:

In this context, it is relevant to note the following in the NSW Education Act 1990 Objects, Section 6 at 1(A)e:

... to provide a context within which schools also have an opportunity to foster the physical and spiritual development of students.

This is an Object that should be replicated in the Australian Education Act 2013.

(ii) Skills

CECNSW reminds the Review of earlier inquiries into 'employability skills'.

Key earlier reviews include:

- Young People's Participation in Post-Compulsory Education and Training ('The Finn Review', 1991)
- The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System ('The Carmichael Report', 1992)
- Putting General Education to Work (The 'Mayer Key Competencies Report', 1993)
- The Australian Certificate of Education ('ACE Report', May 2006)

Commonly, these reports identified skill sets in respect of:

- Communication
- Teamwork

- Problem Solving
- Initiative and Enterprise
- Planning and Organising
- Self- Management
- Organisational outcomes
- Technology

Recommendation:

While CECNSW recommends that the advice arising from the reports on 'employability skills' remains highly relevant to the purpose of the current Review, it strongly advises that they provide only a necessary but not sufficient skill set for contemporary learners.

CECNSW supports the advice set out in the recent Business Council of Australia report, Protecting Australia through Education and Skills, which emphasises the skills of:

- Literacy and Numeracy
- Digital Capacity
- Creativity
- Collegiality

The above outlined approach to skills and school education has also been affirmed by the most recent Productivity Commission Report on Australia's Productivity Performance.

(iii) Knowledge

CECNSW endorses the observations of the 2012 Grattan Institute report Catching Up: Learnings from the Best School Systems in East Asia that effective teaching must drive knowledge acquisition by students. Effective teaching for learning requires:

- teachers' content knowledge;
- teachers' pedagogical knowledge, both of general principles and those specific to their subject;
- teaching practices that focus on clear and well-structured lessons supported by effective classroom management; and
- teaching practices that emphasise individualised instruction (Grattan, p15)

Recommendation:

The above attributes are best realised through a culture of collaboration that supports 'de-privatised' and data-informed practices by teachers supported by school-based Leaders of Learning.

This will require a re-conceptualisation of the work of teachers and schools.

C. How Should Quality and Educational Success be measured?

- C.1. The identification of measures of success first requires clarity as to the criteria by which school effectiveness is to be judged.
- C.2. Catholic school authorities have developed a number of tools for assessing school effectiveness. These tools may incorporate the ACER National School Improvement Tool.
- C.3. The measurement of school success must not be limited or confined to cognitive outcomes as assessed by standardised tests.
- C.4. A Catholic school authority approach to school improvement includes the following criteria and metrics:

(i) Criteria

School Review and Improvement (SRI) must place the focus on continuous school led processes rather than externally driven monitoring.

SRI processes need to be:

- Based on common and clearly articulated mission, vision and values;
- Focused on improving student outcomes;
- Set in an environment of trust that encourages honest responses whilst respecting the dignity of individuals;
- School-driven, continuous and encouraging a culture of self-improvement;
- Linked to appraisal processes, professional learning, planning and goal-setting;
- Inclusive of all members of the community; and
- Flexible to allow schools to establish specific approaches to meet local needs.

(ii) Metrics

Typically, School Improvement Frameworks for Catholic schools include a focused exploration of:

- School vision and mission;

- Students and their learning;
- Pedagogy;
- Human resources leadership and management;
- Resources and facilities;
- Parent partnerships; and
- Strategic leadership and management.

Recommendation:

It is essential that school improvement frameworks are determined at a system (school authority) level and are inclusive of parent and community input. In this context, school Principal leadership is essential and consequently principals need to have their relevant capacities and capabilities developed with respect to the implementation of school improvement frameworks. The support required for this professional development itself requires the active and coordinated support of governments and school authorities.

Question 2

A. Context for Improvement

- A.1. Since year 2000, CECNSW has undertaken a learning growth-based analysis of HSC outcomes across all NSW Catholic secondary schools and this analysis consistently evidences that:

Schools that consistently use the learning-gain data provided by the Analysis for collaborative staff inquiry and professional learning gain both increased performance compared to like schools, and overall improvement in HSC achievement. The aggregate result of this across the sector has been steadily increasing performance of the Catholic cohort in the HSC compared to the whole of the state.

- A.2. The question of school improvement inherently raises the question of teacher development with the consequent need to build teacher capacity; schools and teachers function in a symbiotic relationship with principals as leaders of learning.

- A.3. Effective teaching leads to a recognition and endorsement of Fullan's drivers of successful school systems being networks of schools where there is:

- A nexus of learning-instruction-assessment;
- Social capital to build the profession;
- Pedagogy that matches technology;
- Systemic synergy (Fullan, M., *The Six Secrets of Change*, 2008, p3)

Recommendation:

A.4. CECNSW recommends a focus on Fullan's 'drivers that work', being capacity building, group work, instruction and systemic solutions (Fullan, p5)

A.5. CECNSW strongly argues that these drivers inherently require systemic support. It is timely to remind the current Review that the original Gonski Report argued that school systems 'provide assurance to the Australian Government that Australia has an effective and efficient schooling effort'.

B. How could schools funding be used more efficiently (at the school or system level) to have a significant impact on learning outcomes for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically advanced students?

B.1. CECNSW argues that schools build their capacity by developing the 'collective power of the full staff' (Fullan, M., Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform, 2011, p10).

B.2. The effective and efficient promotion of enhanced learning outcomes for students requires the intentional resourcing and development across each school of teacher capacity in the following domains:

- Knowledge, skills, dispositions of individuals;
- Professional community;
- Program coherence;
- Technical resources; and
- Shared leadership.

B.3. School authorities are best placed to drive this capacity building.

B.4. One key intervention strategy employed by Catholic schools to drive this required teacher development matrix has involved targeted systemic funding for the engagement of 'Teacher Educators' as 'Instructional Leaders' in those schools identified as experiencing educational underperformance as assessed by a range of measures including NAPLAN outcomes.

B.5. This strategy has been further refined in the context of the NSW Catholic sector's implementation of the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan since 2012.

Recommendation:

B.6. Noting the insights from the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan, CECNSW advises that:

- (i) With respect to what action can be taken to improve practice and outcomes?

The following learnings are transferable across schools:

- Investing in systemic support for the role of Instructional Leaders (particularly principals) in schools;
- Development of school-based improvement plans linked to systemic support networks;
- Promotion of explicit teaching;
- Implementation of tiered interventions linked to syllabus-based learning continua;
- Use of formative and diagnostic assessments; and
- Increased teacher collaborative planning.

Recommendation:

- (ii) What works best for whom and in what circumstances?

Consistent with the advice provided above,

- Systematic school-based processes where teachers work collaboratively to analyse student data for the purpose of improving individual and collective results work best.
- Relevant system support includes:
 - Attracting the right people to become teachers
 - Developing them into effective educators
 - Resourcing each school so that it can deliver the most appropriate instruction for every child, with a focus on early intervention to address learning gaps.

C. What institutional or governance arrangements could be put in place to ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence-based good practice to grow and sustain improved student outcomes over time?

C.1. CECNSW approaches governance mindful of the principle of subsidiarity; that is, the principle that any central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a local level. Applying this CECNSW advises that good governance for the purpose of implementing evidence-based effective schooling should be based in a tri-level reform process (Fullan, M., *Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform*, 2011, p16). That is, successful reform needs to dynamically

engage Commonwealth, State and School authorities in systematic collaborative processes.

- C.2. The current Review is directed to the advice arising from the Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, National Education Evidence Base (No 80, December 2016, Recommendation 2.1).

Recommendation:

- C.3. To achieve interconnectedness, CECNSW recommends that the critical importance of system support to school effectiveness be acknowledged and supported through continued Commonwealth financial support for systems of schools and Australian Education Act Representative Bodies.
- D. How can system enablers be improved to help drive educational achievement and success and support effective monitoring reporting and application of investment?
- D.1. Compliance includes school registration and teacher accreditation practices. These are addressed by State regulators such as NESA and, in the opinion of CECNSW, are out of scope for any Australian Government Review.
- D.2. System enablers are most effective when they
- Adopt a continuous improvement approach;
 - Employ a common language;
 - Require and acknowledge school level improvement plans;
 - Are evidence and research-based; and
 - Implement system-wide agreed ‘Indicators of Effectiveness’.
- D.3. Greater emphasis on School Improvement and Effectiveness requirements and processes is required rather than a focus on accountability and compliance.
- D.4. Best practice must be informed by evidence and research as part of a process of professional dialogue and discernment.

Recommendation:

- D.5. In this context, it is advised that the learnings from the NSW Ministerial Education Symposium 2016 Future Reform Directions for NSW should be actively considered by the current Review.
- D.6. This NSW forum identified a set of system-enablers as the drivers of improved school effectiveness being:
- High standards and high expectations;

- Holistic judgement, which involves a capacity to identify student progression, what difficulties they may be experiencing and being flexible enough to meet them where they are;
 - A culture of evidence and analysis, where standards are seen as a common reference point and not a 'checklist'; and
 - A culture of professionalism.
- E. Are there any new or emerging areas for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing?
- E.1. School improvement is a process which requires systemic support inclusive of time and resources.
- E.2. The agreed influences on school capacity and school and student achievement are:
- Systemic policies and programs for teacher professional development;
 - School capacity enhanced through targeted systemic interventions; and
 - Instructional quality: curriculum, instruction, assessment.
- E.3. CECNSW advises that the best drivers of positive change with respect to these factors involve teachers being supported by their school authority to collaboratively implement:
- Clear learning intentions;
 - Challenging success criteria;
 - A range of learning strategies;
 - Feedback to students.

Recommendation:

- E.4. Facilitative Government actions could usefully include support for:
- Reviewing the range of responsibilities currently held by teachers and removing those which detract from their core work of instruction;
 - Programs to develop teachers' skills in data use for instructional decisions;
 - Behavioural skills programs, since children will not learn and succeed if behaviour is poor and learning time is compromised;
 - Further harmonisation of regulatory requirements (Commonwealth, State and Local), while noting the work of ACARA and AITSL;

- Widening the definition of schooling to meet the pre- and post-school needs of students and their families;
- Incentives for leaders and teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools;
- Finding ways to operationalise best practice research undertaken by teachers with a view to promoting good practice and removing ineffective practices from teachers' repertoire.

E.5. To achieve learning gains, CECNSW advocates intentional systemic interventions by school authorities which:

- acknowledge the centrality of teaching and the development of teachers and the critical importance of school leadership;
- expand boundaries of schooling with respect to pre- and post-school services;
- support schools as diverse and inclusive learning communities;
- network and support schools in the context of system-wide improvement priorities;
- promote a holistic model of schooling which combines cognitive, instrumental, affective, spiritual and psychomotor purposes;
- recognise the importance of the affective domain, school culture and purpose including, where relevant, a school's religious purpose, to the establishment of each school's learning culture; and
- build parent and community support for schooling.

Question 3

CECNSW advises that barriers include public policy that:

- devalues systemic approaches to school administration and educational leadership;
- promotes an overly instrumentalist approach to schooling as preparation for work;
- relies on a narrow test(ing)-based approach to the monitoring of whole-of-school effectiveness;
- allows health and welfare agencies to transfer to schools the work that has traditionally been theirs, thus detracting from a focus on learning and a requirement for resources and skills that schools do not have;
- is driven by the search for single factor/methodologies/interventions to 'drive good practice and continuous improvement' (the search for the 'magic bullet');

- adopts any actions that derogate from a school's (or system of schools) unifying ethos and purpose including, as appropriate, its Religious purpose.