

NCEC Accountability Principles

Catholic schools have a responsibility to account for

- (a) the strength and vitality of their Catholic ethos;
- (b) the maintenance and advancement of the highest levels of educational standards and
- (c) the administration of all funds in an equitable, educationally focussed and financially judicious manner.

Catholic schools have a responsibility to report to

- the parents of their students, Catholic school authorities and their supporting Catholic communities in respect of items (a) and (b) above.
 - the appropriate Commonwealth and State/Territory Government authorities in respect of (c) above.
1. The Commission believes that accountability procedures should always have students as their focus. Such procedures should be developed with the clear understanding that the purpose of schooling is to help students develop spiritually, socially and intellectually, and that this multi-faceted development process cannot be adequately measured by any single accountability procedure.
 2. Public funding of all schools is based on the principles of social justice and the right of parents to choose the most appropriate schooling for their children regardless of their income. Commensurate with these principles Catholic schools have a responsibility to report upon their activities and on the learning of students within an appropriate, fair and practical accountability framework.
 3. Catholic school and system authorities have developed and should continue to develop informative accountability procedures that recognise:
 - the duty of Catholic schools to provide parents, school communities and church authorities information on the effectiveness of their mission;
 - the duty of Catholic system authorities to account to government and to the Australian nation for the expenditure of public funds allocated for the educational advancement of its citizens;
 - while Catholic schools receive public funds, they are not public agencies. Fidelity to the Church's educational mission is the primary concern of Catholic schools, which ought not be compromised in order to comply with any government policies which place pressure on that fidelity.
 4. In asserting that school authorities have a right and a duty to ensure that proper standards of education and financial management are maintained in accordance with appropriate norms, the Commission acknowledges that these may include those set by government and statutory authorities. Where differences arise between the objectives of governments and those established by the Catholic community as essential to the character and mission of Catholic education, the latter must prevail and no penalties, financial or otherwise, should result.
 5. Therefore the Commission encourages the responsible and ethical use of educational data to improve student learning. Any instrument or requirement must, however, be demonstrably equitable, fair, reliable and valid. Instruments that do not take adequate

account of the full range of factors affecting educational outcomes, including socio-economic status, family structure, ethnic background, are likely to yield results that do not necessarily reflect the quality of teaching and learning that is being experienced by individual students. In particular, NCEC believes comparisons made between standards and practice in government schools and those applied in non-government schools are neither useful, beneficial, nor likely to positively affect the educational outcomes of students.

6. The Commission seeks in the establishment of educational benchmarks that might be set in relation to national or state goals, an acknowledgment from government authorities of the diversity of students and therefore, the different levels of time and resources needed to reach specific targets or goals. Whatever funding models are used, allocative mechanisms should take into account of areas of need, including educational disadvantage.
7. The Commission seeks from government authorities and responsible Ministers the opportunity
 - o to be adequately consulted on how collected data relevant to Catholic schools is to be used;
 - o to have an active participatory role in directing the development of any instruments or reporting processes.

December 1999