CATHOLIC SCHOOL'S FUTURE

A Guide to Political Action

SchoolFundingFacts.com
The purpose of these guidelines is to set out approaches that Catholic school communities might adopt in their dealings with political candidates, especially in the period prior to an election.

Meeting with a politician/candidate

Probably the best way to communicate Catholic schools’ message to politicians is through a face-to-face meeting.

Identify current Members of Parliament and political candidates contesting the next election and either invite them to the school to meet with a delegation or make an appointment to visit them at their office.

School communities could form a delegation of three or four key people to meet with the political candidates or collaborate with other Catholic schools in the electorate and form a delegation that is representative of all the schools.

Members could include:
- School principal(s);
- Parent representative (president of P&F or another appropriate person);
- Parish priest(s);
- Chair of the school board (or member as appropriate).

Political candidates are very busy. It is important that the time you meet with them is well planned and that a professional approach is maintained before, during and after each meeting.

*Note: A teleconference could also be an option, particularly in larger electorates.*

Prior to the meeting

- To gain the maximum benefit from the meeting, members of the delegation should meet prior to each meeting to plan, clarify issues and determine which questions individual members of the delegation will ask. A member of the delegation should be appointed to act as the chair during the discussion.
- Contact each political candidate to arrange a mutually agreeable time and place to meet.
- Confirm that they have received the documents from your school community outlining key issues for Catholic education. Useful documents can be found at the SchoolFundingFacts.com website.
- Confirm the date, venue and duration of the meeting a few days prior to the scheduled meeting.
- Advise members of the school community of the meeting.

Provide the candidate with:
- the name and role of each person attending the meeting;
- an agenda of items or list of questions as well as material relevant to your local schools;
- a contact name and number of a key representative of the delegation. This gives the candidate a contact point to clarify any agenda issues or meeting arrangements.
At the meeting

The following are some suggested guidelines and protocols to help with conducting a successful meeting:

• Confirm how much time the candidate has available;
• Introduce the members of the delegation;
• Express appreciation for the efforts of politicians on behalf of Catholic education;
• Perhaps open the discussion with comments about the significant contribution of Catholic schools in educating 20 per cent of Australian children;
• Keep the consultation focused on the agenda items and avoid the discussion being side-tracked by irrelevant matters;
• Be careful not to allow any personal political bias to interfere with the focus of the meeting;
• Always be respectful and courteous in your discussion with political candidates. These opportunities are about the short term, in the context of an election, but also about a long-term relationship with the candidate;
• Take a positive, friendly approach. This will promote good relations and a more successful outcome. Hospitality should be part of the welcome if the meeting is being held at the school;
• In discussions, always be faithful to the ethos and values which underpin Catholic education;
• In your discussions, be concerned with the well-being of all children and be mindful that advocacy on behalf of children in Catholic schools should not be at the expense of the well-being and effective education of those in other education sectors;
• Education issues are complex, particularly those around the funding of Catholic schools. Therefore, do not expect that political candidates will have answers to all your questions readily available to them;
• Arrange a follow-up meeting if required;
• Focus on local issues relevant to your schools, for example school buildings and grounds.

After the meeting

• The delegation might allow time for a post-meeting discussion to clarify the issues raised and make a summary list of the outcomes;
• After each meeting with a candidate, formally write to the person, thanking him/her for the time given and summarising any outcomes from the meeting;
• If you intend to provide a report of the meeting to your school community, you should provide a copy to the political candidate prior to publication. This allows the person an opportunity to discuss any amendments or to correct any information;
• If the candidate asked a question you weren’t able to answer, seek assistance from your local Catholic Education Commission and provide an answer to the candidate.
Consider forming an on-going school political action committee

School communities could also consider forming an ongoing political action committee to further the process. This could be done either by individual schools or in collaboration with other local Catholic schools.

A convenor should be appointed to arrange the meetings and plan the action. The meeting could then develop strategies to guide the actions that it will engage in for the longer term, as well as in the lead-up to an election.

It is important and necessary that the committee works closely with leaders of school parent bodies, the school board, the principal of the school, the parish priest and other key stakeholders.

It is recommended that you keep your local Catholic Education Commission informed of any important issues that you think may require additional attention.

Strengthening relationships in the long term

Many school parent bodies, school boards and/or their school principal or parish priest already have very good relationships with local Members of Parliament. These local members are the school community’s representatives and the lives of Catholic school communities are important to them.

In order to develop good relationships with local representatives, ensure they are invited to significant school events and that efforts are made to keep them informed about the life of the school community. You could consider adding them to the mailing list for your school newsletter, for example.

A further strategy might be to write to all local representatives at the start of the year and provide them with an open invitation to attend key school activities, parent body meetings or school board meetings.

You could include a calendar of school events such as awards presentations, fundraisers etc., along with the schedule for P&F meetings. Ideally, politicians should feel comfortable to come to these meetings, even if for a short time, to speak or provide perspectives on current issues. You could also include Senators in these activities and processes as appropriate.

It is only through regular contact that political representatives can come to understand and appreciate what the school is achieving and what its needs are.

Be aware that your invitations may not always attract an immediate response. Sometimes acceptance is impossible because of other commitments, but do not give up.

This material has been adapted, with permission, from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and Queensland Federation of P&Fs’ booklet A Guide to Political Action 2015.
QUESTIONS FOR YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATE

Catholic schools are a major contributor to the Australian education landscape, with more than 764,000 students attending 1,731 Catholic schools across the country. It is important that political candidates and parties understand how their policies will affect those students, their families and the 91,000 people who work in Catholic schools.

Listed below are a series of possible questions you could consider asking of candidates seeking election.

1. How will your policy support parents to choose the education they want for their children and ensure religious freedom for Catholic schools is preserved?

2. How will your policy support student needs and ensure funding keeps pace with the real cost of educating a child?

3. Will our policy support Catholic education systems and schools to distribute funding according to locally identified needs?

4. How will your policy support the needs of students with particular disadvantage, including students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students in rural and remote settings, regardless of the school they attend?

5. How will your policy support the capital needs of Catholic schools? Will it recognise Catholic education’s support of disadvantaged communities and its plans to establish schools in new growth areas?

6. How will your policy deliver funding certainty for schools? Will it be enshrined in legislation?
In 2014, Catholic school parents paid $3.1 billion in fees to support their children’s education.

764,000 students attend 1,731 Catholic schools, which employ more than 91,000 staff.

In 2014, governments provided $7.5 billion in funding to support students in Catholic schools.

Catholic schools provide a balanced and holistic education.

To meet growing demand, more than 70 new Catholic schools are planned for the next five years.

Catholic schools are committed to creating safe environments for all students, teachers and families.

Find out more at SchoolFundingFacts.com

Catholic schools have been part of Australia’s education story for 200 years.

Authorised by Ross Fox, National Catholic Education Commission, Level 3, 156 Gloucester St, Sydney.