



6 March 2019

### **National Catholic Education Commission – Submission to Plenary Council 2020**

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) welcomes the opportunity to be involved in Plenary Council 2020. Working closely with the state and territory Catholic Education Commissions, the NCEC is the national representative body of Australia's Catholic schools. The NCEC is commissioned by and responsible to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) through the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education (BCCE). The NCEC advocates for and develops policy at the national level for the Church's work in Catholic schools.

Australia's Catholic schools have a proud history. Today, Australia's network of over 1740 Catholic schools educate more than 764,000 students and employ over 94,600 teaching and non-teaching staff (75,000 (full-time equivalent)). Australia's Catholic schools continue to educate students from disadvantaged backgrounds, growing proportions of Indigenous students and students with disabilities. The Church has sought universal reach for Catholic schooling and more than 40 per cent of Catholic schools are located outside major metropolitan areas and in many remote Indigenous communities, a Catholic school is the only local school.

Together with families, the broader community and federal, state and territory governments, Australian Catholic schools see themselves as partners in the education system. Australia's Catholic schools represent one of the primary ways that the Church seeks to play a constructive role in the Australian community. Providing an education in a safe and supportive environment that strives to educate the whole child – intellectually, spiritually, physically, morally and emotionally – is our priority. Education which sidelines or excludes the mystery of God from consideration is an education which can only ever be less than complete.

The Plenary Council provides an invaluable opportunity for all in the Church including the NCEC to reflect upon our Mission and Vision and discern what God is asking us to do.

As a first step, the NCEC set out below a short statement in response to the first of the three Plenary questions.

#### **What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?**

*Through prayerful discernment we believe that God is asking the NCEC to live its Mission:*

NCEC lives Jesus' mission for the Church by proclaiming the mission of God in Catholic education through collaboration, advocacy and leadership on national education policy.

*Through prayerful discernment we believe that God is asking the NCEC to enact its Vision:*

Christ-centred Catholic education providing excellent, inclusive and contemporary schooling sustained by equitable funding.

God is asking the NCEC to be even more effective with our Catholic schools. Our Catholic schools must be:

- excellent at evangelisation and offering opportunities to encounter Jesus;
- excellent at providing academic education;
- excellent at providing pastoral care.

*Through prayerful discernment we believe that God is asking the NCEC to continue to propose to Catholic schools, systems and governance authorities in Australia that they enact the understanding of Catholic schools within the wider mission of the Church as it is expressed in the NCEC documents approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, for example:*

‘The person of each individual human being is at the heart of Christ’s teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school.’ The Vatican’s documents on Catholic schooling repeatedly emphasise the need for an educational philosophy built on a solid foundation of sound Christian anthropology.

The Catholic school is committed to the education of the whole person since in Jesus Christ all human values find their fulfilment and unity: ‘herein lies the specifically Catholic character of the school’. Christ is ‘the centre and fulcrum of the entire enterprise’ and ‘the standard and measure of a school’s Catholicity’.

Parents are the first educators and Catholic schooling is a partnership with the home and the parish. [The NCEC] affirms the Christian vocation of educational leaders and teachers and their need for formation of the heart for it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic school achieves its purpose.

The totality of school life aims to give witness to and support students on the path towards a personal integration of faith and life ... Religious Education interacts with and is reinforced by the religious life of the Catholic school which aims to nurture and enrich the religious and spiritual development of students through prayer, celebration of the liturgy and sacraments, faith formation and social justice activities.

Excerpts of NCEC (2017), *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* and NCEC (2018), *Framing Paper: Religious Education in Australian Catholic Schools*

*God is asking the NCEC to address four strategic areas:*

- The wider Mission of the Church
- Australian Government funding and regulation
- Excellent and equitable Catholic schooling
- Outstanding service delivery to stakeholders

God is asking us to be even clearer and more effective in our Catholic Mission and Identity in our schools and school systems.

We are being called to develop an even more coherent educational philosophy built on a solid foundation of sound Christian anthropology so as to promote even more completely and integrally the person of each of our students. Challenges that God is calling the NCEC to address in this area include having our vision of faith included across the curriculum and an even better resourced and supported Religious Education program. God is also calling us to continue to nurture and enrich the religious and spiritual development of students through prayer, celebration of the liturgy and sacraments, faith formation and social justice activities and to get even better at this. In part, this will also require ever greater collaboration, advocacy and leadership on national education policy and regulation so that we remain free to be Catholic schools and Catholic systems. It will also require even better and further faith formation for our staff.

We are being called by God to develop the skills of our teachers as teachers so that the education provided is of the highest standard.

We are being called by God to develop the partnerships, links and better movement between schools and families and between schools and Sunday worshipping communities, including providing opportunities for adult faith formation.

We also require long-term equitable funding so that we can achieve these goals. God is asking the NCEC to work together across our dioceses and States for the good of all students in Catholic schools.

*We believe that God is calling the NCEC to listen, support, dialogue and discern, and contribute to the ongoing processes of the Plenary Council and its gatherings., This includes the provision of documentation and interpretation to promote the mission and sustainability of Catholic education as a vital ministry of the Catholic Church in Australia and a major contributor to the life of the nation.*

More information about the NCEC can be found at <https://www.ncec.catholic.edu.au/>