

20 December 2019

The Hon Ronald Sackville AO QC  
Chair  
Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and  
Exploitation of People with Disability  
GPO Box 1422  
Brisbane QLD 4001  
By email: [DRcenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au](mailto:DRcenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au)

Dear Chair,

### **National Catholic Education Commission – Education Issues paper**

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) is pleased to provide input into the work of this Royal Commission. The NCEC welcomes this significant Royal Commission and looks forward to supporting its work to ensure that violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability is exposed, examined and prevented.

The NCEC is the national representative body of Australia's Catholic schools. Working closely with the state and territory Catholic Education Commissions, the NCEC's advocates for and develops policy at the national level for Australia's Catholic schools. The NCEC was established in 1974 by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) through the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education (BCCE).

### **The mission of Australia's Catholic schools**

Australia's Catholic schools are a vital part of Australia's education landscape. From humble beginnings almost 200 years ago, Catholic schools have grown to become the nation's largest provider of education outside government and key partner in the delivery of quality schooling along with the government and independent sectors.

The mission of Australia's Catholic schools is similar but distinct from other Australian schools. Australia's Catholic schools are inspired by an educational philosophy built on a Catholic understanding of the human person.

*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.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_27041998\\_school2000\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_27041998_school2000_en.html).

Australia's Catholic schools are diverse and universal in their reach, offering an education to all. Increasing numbers of students with disability are educated in Australia's Catholic schools. Currently almost 140,000 students with disability are enrolled in Catholic schools. This equates to approximately 18% of all Catholic school students. The NCEC's expectation is that if past enrolment trends continue, increasing numbers of students with disability will be enrolled in our schools. Further information about our schools is located on the NCEC website which can be accessed here: <https://www.ncec.catholic.edu.au/>.

### General comments

At this stage, the NCEC offers the following general comments. These comments supplement any submissions by state and territory Catholic Education Commissions to the Royal Commission. You may be aware that state and territory commissions individually perform the role of approved system authorities through which most Catholic schools are funded and operated in accordance with the *Australian Education Act 2013* (the Act).

1. Catholic schools operate a devolved model of governance based on the principle of 'subsidiarity' under which decisions are made as close to possible to the local level as appropriate. This provides considerable governance autonomy to school authorities, including religious institutes, principals, other school staff and school boards to operate their schools. Diocesan Catholic education offices and state and territory Catholic education commissions work in partnership with schools to achieve the mission of the Catholic school.
2. Australia's Catholic schools value inclusion, welcome students with disability and make reasonable adjustments to ensure that they can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. Adjustments by Australia's Catholic schools are made not only in compliance with the *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)* (the DDA) but also as part of their mission to offer an education built on a Catholic understanding of the human person.
3. Our network of Catholic schools educates students with disability in mainstream and specialist settings which in many instances work together to provide an education which best suits the individual student and their needs. A major strength of the Australian school environment is its diversity and the acknowledgement that parents and carers are entitled to choose the education that best meets the needs of their children.
4. The funding of students with disability is an ongoing issue for governments and policy makers. For example, the NCEC awaits the report of the National School Resourcing Board review of the loading for students with disability. All students with disability should be funded on the same basis, regardless of the education sector.

Please contact the NCEC should you wish to discuss this letter and any of the issues raised.

Yours faithfully,



Jacinta Collins  
Executive Director