



... Leadership, Advocacy and Support

Council of Catholic School Parents

Submission

**Inquiry into measurement and
outcomes-based funding in New
South Wales Schools**

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Preamble

This submission has been prepared by the Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT (CCSP) on behalf of the parents of over 250,000 students in Catholic schools in NSW. CCSP appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the Inquiry into measurement and outcomes-based funding in New South Wales Schools.

CCSP is an independent association and the officially recognised body representing the interests of parents and carers with children in Catholic schools in NSW/ACT. The work of the Council is guided by the principles of choice, equity and social justice. CCSP is a founding member of the national body Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA).

This submission provides feedback in response to the Terms of Reference released by the Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education. In that respect, this submission loosely follows the structure of the Terms of Reference in providing comment.

CCSP notes that this feedback is provided in the context of the ongoing Review of the NSW Curriculum currently taking place here in NSW. CCSP also notes that this feedback is provided in the context of the review into NAPLAN currently being conducted in NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

Feedback

CCSP is supportive of the Committee's intention to strive for ongoing improvement in the measurement and funding of student outcomes in NSW schools. Parents value transparency around school and student outcomes and the Committee's Inquiry is an opportunity to explore further the improvement of school and student outcomes in NSW. CCSP welcomes the opportunity to provide some comments on the terms of reference on behalf of the more than 160,000 families who choose to send one or more of their children to a NSW Catholic school.

In terms of NSW school results relative to other states and other countries, the views of parents of children in Catholic schools range widely. Some parents monitor closely movements in national results, such as NAPLAN, and international results, such as PISA. Some parents are concerned about what is referred to as the declining standards that appear to be evidenced by student results using both national and international measures. Other parents are more skeptical about the relevance and accuracy of such measures and are more interested in what the school results tell them about their own child. While some parents applaud the publication of the various measures that are taken, others consider almost any publicity around school results to be an unhelpful distraction to the educational enterprise irrespective of the extent to which the trends reflect policy.

CCSP is aware that Catholic schools in NSW are currently subject to a thorough framework of compliance and accountability that has served well the NSW Catholic school sector and its

families. Parents who make a conscious choice to send their children to Catholic schools both endorse the approach the schools take while at the same time enable these schools to remain financially viable due to the student-based funding their children attract. If parents were not satisfied with the outcomes delivered by Catholic schools, they would seek an education for their children elsewhere. In this way, the very enrolment of students in Catholic schools is a measure of their accountability.

In NSW, parents engage with the public reporting regimes overseen by both ACARA and NESA that help them to hold their child's school accountable for their child's educational progress. Parents are aware that, at both national and state levels, there are multitudinous requirements around compliance and reporting that serve to underpin transparency and regulation of the Catholic school sector's operations and, in particular, the funding the sector receives. Parents know that both quantitative and qualitative data are used to drive teaching and learning. They currently see teachers using data to refine the approach they take in order to optimise the learning gain of each individual student. This use of data and evidence-informed decision making is now an evident feature of the culture of schools and it is to be encouraged. CCSP recommends a strengthening of this culture because of the way in which it enables the educational attainment of our children.

Hence, while open to suggestions of how current measures may be improved, parents are typically satisfied with the accountability framework to which Catholic schools in NSW are now subject. What would not be welcome, however, is any change that risks having a detrimental effect on the quality of teaching and learning provided by Catholic schools. Rather, CCSP supports moves to reduce the amount of red tape schools and teachers face so that more of their limited resources can be directed to effective teaching and learning strategies.

In addition to potential impacts on the quality of teaching and learning, any shift in policy that threatens the availability of Catholic schools as a genuinely affordable choice for Catholic school families would meet with the disapproval of CCSP and the more than 160,000 families for whom we speak. Furthermore, CCSP cautions against any policy direction that risks inhibiting Catholic schools from providing families in NSW with a distinctly Catholic education. Many families choose Catholic schools because they are more in keeping with the family's beliefs and practices than any other kind of school. It is important that this continues. CCSP is not suggesting that the outcomes-based budgeting for NSW schools, if adopted, would necessarily have a deleterious effect, but it must be a consideration in any inquiry with the potential to have an impact on the life of a school.

CCSP sees it as vital that any potential introduction of outcomes-based budgeting serves only to strengthen the degree to which the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with a disability are supported. Were such an introduction to give greater parental/community involvement in school accountability, then this may be a positive outcome, however, sufficient checks and balances would need to be provided to ensure appropriate levels of expertise are relied on in any accountability exercise. If an outcomes-based budgeting approach were proven to enhance the status and quality of the teaching

profession and establish international best practice for teaching methods, performance, measurement and school management, then this would be advantageous. However, CCSP notes that ensuring accuracy and objectivity in the measurement of such proposed consequences is likely to be challenging.

In terms of the funding of schools into the future and whether it should be linked to outcomes and performance, CCSP reiterates the need to ensure that Catholic schools remain an affordable choice for the families of NSW. CCSP recommends the provision of wrap-around services to support educational outcomes as long as they are sector-blind.

Conclusion

CCSP acknowledges that while NSW schools currently exist within an extensive regulatory framework, we are open to exploring ways in which it may be improved. This, however, cannot be at the expense of the quality of teaching and learning or the distinctive education provided by the Catholic school. In supporting this Inquiry, CCSP notes that schools across NSW, including Catholic schools, are continually striving to improve student outcomes through a variety of creative and groundbreaking, evidence-based initiatives. Any shifts in policy should only serve to further that end.

CCSP is grateful for the opportunity to provide this feedback to the Committee and would welcome any opportunity to contribute further to the Committee's work.