Dear Parents and Carers,

I warmly welcome you to the 2012 school year. Whether you are continuing your participation in Catholic schooling or joining the Catholic education community for the first time, I hope that 2012 will be happy and rewarding for you and your children.

I am very encouraged by your continuing confidence and trust in our Catholic schools. The trend of enrollment growth continues into 2012, with preliminary figures showing a rise of almost 4,000 students to about 198,000 across Victoria. The new St Francis of Assisi School in Tarneit, in Melbourne’s west, opened with almost 1,000 students – unprecedented for a new Catholic school.

These figures reinforce the importance of parent choice in the education of their children. We are committed to protecting that choice.

This letter provides an overview of the recent Report of the Review of Funding for Schooling and the Australian Government’s response (pages 2 and 3). My office is currently analysing the report to determine its implications. I understand the sacrifices you make to give your children a Catholic education and you can rest assured that we will make every effort to safeguard the levels of funding to students in Catholic schools. The Australian Government’s recognition that parents face financial pressures and can’t afford for school fees to increase is encouraging. Nonetheless, in the coming months we may call on you to help us protect the future of Catholic education in Victoria.

On page 4 of this letter you will also see a preview of the new Catholic Education Melbourne website www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au. I encourage you to visit the site, which celebrates Catholic education in our schools and is intended to support parents more effectively by providing easier access to a range of information.

Catholic education is a partnership between parents and their children’s school and our task is to support you as the first and lifelong educators of your children.

Research is clear that strong partnerships between the school, the family and the community contribute to improved wellbeing and learning in our students. I encourage you, therefore, to take up the opportunities to engage with the school in your children’s learning.

One initiative to facilitate this partnership is the Integrated Catholic Online Network (ICON). One proposed component of this is the Ultranet, a secure online learning site which will give you 24/7 access to current information about your children, including their attendance, timetable, homework, teacher feedback and learning progress, and allow you to view electronic portfolios of their work.

Catholic education is always exploring new ways to support our young people and their families. An example of this is the new St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre in North Melbourne, run by Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) Youth+. It broadens the opportunities for students in Years 7–10 needing re-engage with education in a supported learning environment.

Our mission is “to provide an outstanding Catholic education that integrates faith, life and culture”. The Australian Bishops have called us to a Year of Grace, beginning at Pentecost, and Pope Benedict has called us to celebrate a Year of Faith, to begin in October. These are opportunities for us, individually and as a community, to deepen our faith in Jesus. Inspired and strengthened by this faith, we can together build the future of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

My best wishes for the year ahead.

Stephen Elder
Executive Director of Catholic Education
Fair Funding for Catholic Schools

CATHOLIC FUNDING PRINCIPLES
There are three main principles for funding Catholic schools:

- Additional funding to Catholic schools is needed to close the gap between Catholic schools and government schools.
- Government funding must keep pace with the cost of educating a child in a government school.
- Fair funding for students with disability and special needs is essential, so that all students, regardless of the school they attend, receive funding to meet their needs.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN VICTORIA AT A GLANCE
Catholic schools in Victoria educate one-in-five Victorian students, and make up the sixth largest schooling system in Australia.

FUNDING IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
Catholic students already receive, on average, 20 per cent less government funding than students in government schools. When fees from parents are included, Catholic schools operate on around 90 per cent of the cost of education in a Victorian government school.

THE GONSKI REPORT
The Gonski Report has called for an additional $5 billion in government funding for education for all school sectors.

This will be delivered through a new way for determining school funding, made up of two parts:

1. A base, least-cost amount per student for all schools, based on the average cost of delivering educational outcomes in a high-performing school. It is recommended that non-government schools will receive part of this, based on the capacity of parents to pay, determined through a measure similar to the existing SES.

2. Additional funding for needs, such as those of students with disability, through funding loadings.

The Gonski Report has also called for additional funding for capital works, arguing that the needs of all schools should be taken into account with both the development of new schools, and maintenance works in existing schools.

WHERE TO FROM HERE
The Australian and state and territory governments have said that they won’t be able to afford to meet the Gonski report’s call for an additional $5 billion in funding at this time. As a consequence, the Australian Government has announced that further consultation will take place to examine how schools should be funded.

The government has recognised that parents already face financial pressures in relation to school fees and can’t afford for them to rise beyond their reach. The Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) is currently analysing the report to examine the implications for school funding and parent fees.

Visit www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au for more funding information. The CEOM will also update parents through their schools on a regular basis.

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