Director’s Message

Catholic education supports the announcement of the Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse is a source of distress and outrage for us all, but the impact on us is as nothing when compared with its impact on the children and their families. We must support the survivors in their healing, with a listening heart and deep compassion.

The Royal Commission will be an opportunity for this healing, particularly the healing of the survivors, but also of their families, their communities, the nation and, not least, our Church and the other institutions which have fallen short in their responsibility to the children in their care. Survivors will have the chance to be heard, and have their stories taken seriously and their pain both acknowledged and understood.

The Royal Commission is also an opportunity for reform, establishing better systems to protect children in the future. We will work with the Royal Commission to help ensure the wrongs of the past are acknowledged and can never happen again.

These are painful times. Those of us who are Catholic, and those in our communities who work in Catholic institutions, are probably all affected to some degree by the community’s anger, doubt and suspicion. Through these challenging times it will be important for us as leaders to remind our school communities of the importance and value of their commitment to Catholic education.

It is important that we support each other at this time. I know that many parish communities have offered strong support to their priests. We give thanks for the overwhelming majority of priests and religious who have always served our community with integrity, care and compassion.

My hope is that the Royal Commission will provide both survivors and the Catholic community with a lasting opportunity to heal.

With every good wish to you and your families as we reflect on and celebrate the birth of Christ and its meaning in our life and work.

Stephen Elder
Executive Director of Catholic Education

Building better boards

MAKING A DIFFERENCE – EVALUATING YOUR BOARD
As a board it is important to take the time to ask ‘Is our board making a difference? To answer this question, it is important to:

1. Explore what your board looks like when it is functioning within its scope and at its best with regards to but not limited to the following:
   - Leadership
   - Relationships
   - Working together
   - Clarity of roles, expectations and objectives
   - Diversity of skill sets and experience
   - Processes
   - Culture, e.g. trust and dialogue, respectful and supportive questioning, constructive challenging of assumptions
   - Continuous learning and improvement
   - Evaluation of performance.

2. Develop and agree on actions that can be taken to be your best.
3. Identify descriptors for the board’s values that demonstrate its effectiveness.

4. Timetable the steps you will take in 2013 to be the best board you can be.

An independent facilitator can help the discussion to stay on track, to clarify points as needed, can provide context, and will capture data, key themes and questions to be answered.

A survey tool to assist this process is available on the CEVN website http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au under School Improvement/Parish-School Boards/A Guide for Parish Education Boards. The survey can be contextualised to your specific needs.

**Reflect and consider**

**COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS**

Has your board considered conducting a community conversation to enhance your work in supporting the school?

When parents are given a meaningful voice, a shared understanding of the school and its identity can be developed. With a sense of connectedness positive outcomes for the whole school community will result.

Community conversations occur in small groups (8–10 people) addressing an issue guided by a few questions. Community conversations are an opportunity to explore and discuss matters that are important to your school and community and in the process learn and enhance how you as a board work together. The purpose of the conversation is to encourage creative conversation with a view to encourage diverse ideas and perspectives, share thinking and experience, connect and listen, and perhaps identify deeper questions.

Well thought out and powerful questions that really matter will guide the conversation. In formulating the questions ensure they are inquiry focused, thought provoking, open, simple and clear. An independent facilitator, will help the group stay on task, provide context, clarify points as needed, capture data, key themes and questions.

In choosing the participants it is suggested that you identify people who hold diverse perspectives and who are able to respect and respond to the perspectives of others. Multiple perspectives provide valuable insights, possibilities, potential and input to enable new ideas to emerge.

Disagreement is to be expected. Conversation guidelines will help facilitate the best conversation possible. For example,

‘Everyone speaks – from the heart as well as the head
Everyone listens – with curiosity and respect
Everyone challenges – not each other, but our own fondly held assumptions
Everyone learns – about ourselves, about others, and about our community
Everyone imagines – possibilities and potentials for positive change
Everyone makes a difference! Each of us, through our own thinking and actions, contributes to the building of … community’


**2013 seminars and network meetings**

Members of Catholic school boards looking to improve their knowledge and skills and enhance their contributions to their children’s school may like to participate in the following Catholic Education Office Melbourne’s (CEOM) activities.

**Seminar for new primary school board members**

The CEOM school board seminar program is most relevant to new primary school board members. Topics include

- role and function of the school board
- place of the school board in the community
- key attributes of an effective board member
- structure and proceedings of board meetings.

This seminar is repeated three times in 2013 on 1 May, 18 June and 1 August and will be held at the Catholic Leadership Centre, East Melbourne.

See the CEOM website [www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au) under Our Schools / School Boards / Professional Learning for details. Board members interested in attending the seminars should seek their school principal’s assistance to register through My PL (IPLS) on the CEVN website [http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au](http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au).
Online resources for ongoing formation of school board members
The CEOM provides online resources to assist with the formation of board members and boards. The resources are located on the CEVN website http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au under School Improvement / Parish-School Boards.

Meetings of board chairs
Board chairs may be interested in joining a CEOM network. The primary and secondary board chair networks meet once a term.

The primary network meetings are scheduled for **20 March**, **5 June**, **7 August** and **17 October** at the Catholic Leadership Centre, East Melbourne.

The secondary network meetings are on **13 March** (Parade College, Bundoora), **22 May** (Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Bentleigh), **21 August** (Penola Catholic College, Broadmeadows) and **6 November** (Sacred Heart College, Newtown).

See the CEOM website www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au under Our Schools / School Boards / Professional Learning for details. To register, contact Patricia Palman on 9267 0228 or via ppalman@ceomelb.catholic.edu.au.

Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB)

The VCSPB Council members in 2013 will be:

**Archdiocese of Melbourne**
Ms Lisa Hughes (Deputy Chair)

**Diocese of Ballarat**
Mr Matthew McIntyre (Executive Committee)
Ms Tracey O’Neill (Chair)

**Diocese of Sandhurst**
Ms Liz Grogan (Executive Committee)

**Diocese of Sale**
Mr Shayne Annett (Executive Committee)

**Catholic Education Commission Victorian Ltd representative**
Mr Dennis Torpy.

The purpose of the VCSPB is to:
- represent parents of students in Victorian Catholic schools
- promote parents as partners in education
- promote the principles of Catholic education
- promote Catholic schools as schools of first choice for Catholic families.

The role of a Council member includes:

- attendance at Council meetings; a minimum of 4 meetings a year, including the AGM; members must attend the first meeting of the year and the AGM in person and may opt to attend the other meetings by tele/video conference
- active participation and contribution in all VCSPB work: committees, meetings, stakeholder engagement, publications and submissions
- dissemination and exchange of information with VCSPB contact persons and school boards, in person and by email
- collaboration with the relevant Catholic education authorities to represent the views of Catholic education on relevant diocesan, state and national level committees
- analyse and research policies of education authorities, governments and other agencies for their impact on our schools.

Vacancies exist on the Council. If you are interested in becoming a member of the Council, contact the VCSPB for information at secretary@vcspb.catholic.edu.au.

Visit the VCSPB website which has been redeveloped and includes resources and links which will be useful to parents. Find out about our new logo and read our Annual Report to find out more about the VCSPB and how it represents parents of children in Catholic schools in Victoria.

May the peace and joy of the Season be yours now and into 2013.