



FEDERATION
of Religious Institute
and Ministerial PJP
Catholic School Authorities
in NSW and ACT

**REPORT OF CHAIR OF COUNCIL
TO
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
16 NOVEMBER 2020**

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Chair Report for AGM

Introduction

In reporting on the activities of the Federation in 2020, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is pre-eminent. However before the arrival of the virus in Australia, 2020 signalled some new beginnings for the Federation.

With the retirement from office by the Founding Chair, Brother Paul Oakley cfc and the Executive Officer Mr Greg Smith in 2019, this year a new Chair commenced and Michael McDonald was appointed the new Executive Officer. With Michael's life time commitment to work in the Church, and particularly as CEO of CCER, he has brought great insight, experience and purpose to the role of Executive Officer. On behalf of all members of the Federation I thank Michael for his work this year, which has been repeatedly characterised by time spent above and beyond the allocated hours.

Functioning of the Council

The Council has met four times this year in person and by video conference. The matters attended to have been faithfully captured in the minutes, which have been distributed to all Members throughout the year.

COVID-19 response

Since March, the Federation has been constantly in dialogue with Catholic Schools NSW, and the NSW Department of Health. In the initial stages of school moving to offsite learning, the Federation played a key role in collaborating with CSNSW and through them with the NCEC and Australian Bishops Commission for Catholic Education in regard to appropriate communications. Members will recall the heightened sensitivities at that time in regard to schools being open and the associated expectations of the Federal and State Governments, which were underscored by explicit references to funding arrangements. CSNSW was strongly supported by the Federation in the provision of information and advice as well as a firm commitment to their responsibility as the voice for all Catholic Schools in the State.

The Federation played an active role with CSNSW and the AIS in working with the NSW Department of Health in regard to the impacts of COVID-19 in schools. Members of Council, senior officers of different education authorities, the Federation Executive Officer and Principals all persisted in advocating greater clarity in response to the context of boarding schools. Two key meetings were held with Dr Kerry Chant and then a further meeting with senior members of the Department of Health from which further guidelines were progressively provided by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC).

The immediate and longer term financial impacts of COVID-19 upon families with children in Catholic schools has been front of mind for all schools and Education Authorities. The Federation facilitated the engagement of John Wilcox and NEXIA to assist schools in planning contingencies in the dynamic economic environment. The service was offered as an addition to existing school and authority finance management to provide a focal point for collective insights and approaches as we navigated these uncertain times.

The Federation also communicated directly with the CEO of NCEC advocating the need for Catholic representation to the Federal Government for immediate financial support for families in need, particularly in circumstances where pre-COVID estimated “capacity to contribute” had been compromised due to the effects of the pandemic.

Catholic Block Grant Authority

After some years of persistent and forthright advocacy by Brother Jeff Regan cfc on behalf of CLRI and then the Federation, and the restructuring of processes with the advent of CSNSW, RI/PJP school requests for Capital Funding will receive more impartial assessment in comparison with the previous procedures under CEC NSW. With additional funding available from the NSW Government in 2020 and 2021 in fulfilling the undertakings made before the last State election, the Federation was active in supporting CSNSW in encouraging RI and PJP schools to make applications. It is also important to note the work of Dallas McInerney in successfully addressing an important anomaly that had evolved with the AIS BGA. The resultant correction has assisted the CBGA in supporting all Catholic schools with the exception of those who have formally become members of the AIS BGA.

National Developments

Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial PJPs established a new committee to replace the former Catholic Religious Australia Education Committee. The new entity is named the *Committee of Religious Institute and Ministerial PJP School Authorities Australia* (CORMSAA). NSW Members of the Committee, which is chaired by Philomena Billington, include Emeritus Professor Marea Nicholson and Dr Frank Malloy. The Committee has direct relationships with each State and Territory RI and PJP school authorities as well as direct relationship with NCEC. A function of the Committee is to nominate candidates to the Australian Bishops Commission for Education for membership on the National Catholic Education Commission. It was through CORMSAA that the RI/PJP schools were represented at the recent annual NCEC Diocesan Directors Forum.

Education Policy Committee

The Education Policy Committee under the leadership of Ms Kitty Guerin has been active in promoting the Federation among Catholic School Authorities, Principals and constructively engaging with CSNSW on a range of issues through participation in various critical CSNSW Committees. The agendas and minutes from these meetings provide an accurate overview of the issues addressed.

An important initiative undertaken by the Committee, facilitated by Kitty and Michael, was a gathering of RI and PJP Principals by video conference in October. There were approximately 40 participants, and this represented the majority of schools. The design of the meeting allowed participants to express their understanding of the Federation and nominate ways in which it could be more effective. The feedback will form the basis for a strategic plan for the Federation to be finalised early in 2021.

Memorandum of Understanding

Conversations commenced in 2019 with Bishop Anthony Randazzo as Chair of the Board for CSNSW are to be progressed later in 2020 or early 2021. The intention of Council is to initially seek Anthony's informal advice in relation to an MOU between the Bishops and Members of the Federation.

State of the System Report – submission made in response to draft report

The Federation was invited by CSNSW to comment during the drafting process for the 2020 CSNSW State of the System Report. A 2000 word submission was made, which sought to capture observations from key members of the Education Policy Committee, Principals and Council Members. Noteworthy was advocacy for the RI/PJP statistics to be consistently disaggregated from Diocesan data for the sake of accuracy and transparency in order to better inform future decision making processes across the Catholic sector in NSW.

Catholic Schools data tool review

The Chair of Council was invited to meet with the new Chair of NCEC Nicholas Moore and senior officers from CSNSW to evaluate a new data tool for all Catholic schools, Dioceses and authorities. The tool is a powerful instrument in presenting key data sets for Catholic schools and neighbouring schools from other sectors. NAPLAN results including comparative analysis of statistically similar schools and learning gain featured prominently as did enrolment trends.

Conclusion

In concluding I thank all the members of Council and Education Policy Committee for their generosity in giving time for the common good of Catholic education in NSW.



Dr Frank Malloy

23 October 2020