



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION

Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Mr Jonathan Davis MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Peter Cain MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure

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Mr Michael Pettersson MLA
Chair | Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: LACommitteeECI@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Mr Pettersson

RE: Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure – CECG Submission

I write on behalf of Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn (**CECG**) to provide a brief submission to the *Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure (Inquiry)*.

CECG has received confirmation from the Committee Secretary that the Inquiry is focused on government school infrastructure, though the Committee welcomes submissions from the non-government school sector.

CECG has elected to make this submission to assist the Committee to understand some of the particular challenges that CECG faces in the context of school infrastructure.

CECG Context

1.1 CECG has been serving families in Canberra since 1927, when the first Catholic school in Canberra opened its doors in Manuka. CECG seeks to operate ACT Catholic schools in parallel with ACT Government schools, providing a low-fee, faith-based, and inclusive schooling option for ACT families.

1.2 In the ACT, CECG systemic schools include:

- 24 primary schools, 8 of which have early learning centres (ELCs) on site.
- 5 colleges.
- 14,717 full time students, 2.1 full equivalent of part time students.
- 978 teachers (full-time equivalent)
- 272 support staff (full-time equivalent)
- 379 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

- 1.3 CECG manages school buildings of varying age and condition across the ACT, for example St Benedict's Primary School, Narrabundah, St Joseph's Primary School, O'Connor and Merici College, Braddon all opened in the 1950s. Significantly all but two ACT schools have been operating for more than twenty years.
- 1.4 Seventy five percent of CECG schools in the ACT were built before 1990 when the use of both lead paint and asbestos materials was common in the construction of residential and commercial buildings.

Management of hazardous substances and materials in schools

- 1.5 CECG continuously works to ensure schools are safe spaces for students, teachers and the school community and the necessary infrastructure is in place to support the delivery of high-quality education. Significant resources are invested to maintain CECG ACT Schools.
- 1.6 Within CCEG's significant portfolio of schools located across more than 30 sites, a number of schools have been identified as containing some amount of asbestos and/or lead paint. CECG conducts regular reviews of all school buildings to check the condition of hazardous materials so that emerging issues can be identified and responded to quickly and appropriately.
- 1.7 All CECG schools with known asbestos have been surveyed and have a management plan. These reports are part of the Hazardous Materials Register kept at the school's front office. Asbestos surveys are reviewed annually.
- 1.8 Hazardous materials such as asbestos and lead paint create risks in schools that CECG has to manage, and there are inherent costs associated with the management of this risk. CECG would welcome any support that the ACT government commits to providing to address hazardous materials in schools, particularly on an equitable basis across both government and non-government school systems.
- 1.9 It should also be noted that in recent years, PFAS contamination was identified at St Thomas Aquinas Primary School in Charnwood. CECG worked collaboratively with various ACT government agencies to manage and address the risks associated with the contamination. While there have been some delays with progressing the work to remediate the grounds of the schools, overall CECG has appreciated the manner in which ACT government agencies have worked with CECG to manage the contamination.

School Buildings

- 1.10 CECG's School Planning & Facilities Team is a dedicated team responsible for the ongoing maintenance of school infrastructure, as well as overseeing applications to the ACT Block Grant Authority Incorporated (**ACTBGA**) for additional funding and delivery of capital works projects.
- 1.11 In addition to tuition fees, parents of ACT Catholic Systemic schools are requested to contribute to the Canberra Catholic Schools Building Fund. The Fund is a voluntary, tax-deductible building fund providing funds which go towards school maintenance and refurbishment costs, new schools, building insurances etc.

- 1.12 As a non-government school system, CECG is precluded from spending recurrent funding from the Commonwealth on capital projects.
- 1.13 Many CECG school buildings are over six decades old (see Attachment 1) and in significant need of maintenance and/or replacement.
- 1.14 To address facility issues in schools, and to ensure the safety and accessibility of school buildings, CECG relies heavily on BGA funding and monies collected from parents through the Canberra Catholic Schools Building Fund to fund infrastructure projects.
- 1.15 As school buildings continue to age, and maintenance costs continue to rise, servicing school building requirements to ensure contemporary and accessible learning spaces continues to present a challenge for CECG.
- 1.16 In 2019, CECG received a total of \$1.693m from the ACTBGA as a contribution towards the construction of new classrooms and other amenities at St Anthony's Primary School and St Vincent's Primary School.¹
- 1.17 CECG supports any initiatives that the ACT government may have that will increase the financial commitment made to families of non-government school children to ensure equitable access to contemporary school building facilities.

New School Opportunities

- 1.18 As Canberra's population continues to grow, CECG is committed to providing Catholic education in new and growing suburbs so that there is genuine choice for Canberra's families to easily access school settings that will align with their values and meet their children's needs.
- 1.19 While there are commitments to establishing a number of new government schools over the next five years, there are limited opportunities in new suburbs for the establishment of non-government schools. Diversity in the education market provides options for Canberra families. Barriers to access land for non-government schools impedes the ability of Canberra families to exercise choice in the education of their children.
- 1.20 CECG would welcome additional land releases in new and/or existing suburbs for the establishment of non-government schools.

¹ https://actbga.org.au/documents/CGP_List-of-Approved-Projects.pdf

Challenges

- 1.21 Catholic Education faces a continuing challenge to provide sufficient funds to manage the upkeep of school buildings across the ACT.
- 1.22 CECG welcomes any initiatives that the ACT government may have that will increase the financial commitment made to families of non-government school children to ensure equitable access to safe, accessible, and modern school building facilities.

I would be happy to appear at any future public hearings of the Inquiry. You can contact my office via Tiffany Wallace (Executive Officer, Directorate Services) on Tiffany.Wallace@cq.catholic.edu.au or 0438 629 422.



Ross Fox
DIRECTOR
14 May 2021

Attachment 1 – Establishment of CECG Schools

CECG School	Suburb	Year Built
<i>St Benedict's Primary School</i>	Narrabundah	1955
<i>St Joseph's Primary School</i>	O'Connor	1956
<i>Merici College</i>	Braddon	1959
<i>St Thomas More's Primary School</i>	Campbell	1960
<i>St Bede's Primary School</i>	Red Hill	1963
<i>Rosary Primary School</i>	Watson	1963
<i>St Clare's College</i>	Griffith	1965
<i>Holy Trinity Primary School</i>	Curtin	1966
<i>Sts Peter & Paul Primary School</i>	Garran	1968
<i>Sacred Heart Primary School</i>	Pearce	1968
<i>St Vincent's Primary School</i>	Aranda	1970
<i>St John Vianney's Primary School</i>	Waramanga	1971
<i>St Matthew's Primary School</i>	Page	1972
<i>St Thomas Aquinas Primary School</i>	Charnwood	1975
<i>St Jude's Primary School</i>	Holder	1975
<i>St Francis Xavier College</i>	Florey	1976
<i>St Thomas the Apostle Primary School</i>	Kambah	1977
<i>St Monica's Primary School</i>	Evatt	1977
<i>St John the Apostle Primary School</i>	Florey	1979
<i>St Anthony's Parish Primary School</i>	Wanniassa	1980
<i>St Michael's Primary School</i>	Kaleen	1982
<i>Holy Family Primary School</i>	Gowrie	1985
<i>St Francis of Assisi Primary School</i>	Calwell	1988
<i>St Clare of Assisi Primary School</i>	Conder	1994
<i>Holy Spirit Primary School</i>	Nicholls	1996
<i>St Mary Mackillop College*</i>	Tuggeranong	1998
<i>Good Shepherd Primary School</i>	Amaroo	2002
<i>Mother Teresa School</i>	Harrison	2010
<i>St John Paul II College</i>	Nicholls	2013

*Mackillop was officially opened when Padua High School (built in 1978) and St Peter's Catholic College (built in 1989) were amalgamated in 1998.