



TASMANIAN
CATHOLIC
education commission

Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission

Submission to the ACER Yr 9-12 Review

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A STATEMENT ON THE FOCUS OF THIS SUBMISSION

This submission by the Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission seeks to make comment on the 'big picture' issues and perspectives facing the provision of Year 9-12 education for the young people of Tasmania. It recognises that the delivery of education initiatives certainly requires attention to the detail of process which will feature in the delivery of any reform. No doubt a great percentage of the submissions to the ACER Review will rightly focus wholly or in part on the details of process and methodology. This submission however is concerned with the critically important aspirational focus necessary to underpin and drive initiatives in Year 9-12 education in this State. This submission takes the position that unless there is a profound aspirational commitment to high expectations of performance and achievement of the Year 9-12 student cohorts of the future, a focus on manipulating procedures will simply be 'rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic'.

INTRODUCTION:

Catholic education commends the Hodgman Government in initiating this Review of Year 9 to 12 education in Tasmania as well as its selection of the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) to undertake the Review.

Catholic schools educate more than 16,000 students in 38 schools across Tasmania. A key mission of Catholic schools is to ensure students are not prevented from achieving their potential because of background or family circumstances, or because of the location of their schools. Catholic school communities are geographically, economically and socially diverse and they educate students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Catholic schools:

- Have been part of Australia's education system since 1806 and the Tasmanian schooling system since 1825
- Exist to allow parents the option of a Catholic education for their children
- Do not deny a child a Catholic education because of their family's financial situation
- Receive less public funding than government schools
- Strive to keep fees low so that schools remain accessible for all families
- Are open to students of all backgrounds - Catholic, non-Catholic, socially advantaged and disadvantaged, indigenous and those with a disability and are representative of the wider Australian society



- Enrolment of students with a disability and indigenous students has significantly increased in the last 5 years
- Have contributed significantly to the nation's cultural, social and economic life; encouraging the development of well-rounded Australian citizens who are engaged in their community

YEAR 9-12 EDUCATION:

Catholic Education offers secondary education across 14 colleges in a variety of schooling formats that are listed below. The Tasmanian Catholic Education Office 2016 Census indicates that there are 5448 students enrolled in Year 7-10 and 1853 students enrolled in Year 11 and 12¹, which approximates 20% of all Tasmanian students enrolled in the three education sectors.

		Year 9-10	Yr 11 -12
St Aloysius College Kingston and Huntingfield	K-10	140	
St James College Cygnet	K-10	45	
Star of the Sea Georgetown	K-10	24	
Dominic College Glenorchy	K-10	228	
Guilford Young College Hobart and Glenorchy	11-12		947
MacKillop College Mornington	7-10	265	
Marist Regional College Burnie		292	221
Mt Carmel College Sandy Bay	K-10	126	
Sacred Heart College New Town	K-10	235	
St Brendan Shaw College Devonport	7-12	253	180
St Mary's College Hobart	K-12	186	102
St Patrick's College Launceston	7-19	553	403
St Virgil's College Hobart and Austin's Ferry	3-10	303	
St Francis Flexible Learning Centre Chigwell		50	

¹ August 2016 Census for Department of Education

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATION

We believe that the following guiding principles should be foundational to any review of Year 9-12 education provision:

- The core focus of the Year 9-12 education provision Review must be on education itself. Recent debate with respect to proposed changes to the Education Act have rarely risen above an economic view of education and disappointingly has presented students as a commodity
- As a Catholic sector, we also argue that the guiding principles need to be more reflective of the Melbourne Declaration (2008), with an approach towards a more holistic education including the spiritual dimension
- Educational provision has a moral obligation to be student centered, requiring providers to align such provision to the needs of each student
- The human and social capital element of our educational platform needs to be explored and given credence as an important indicator of success
- Our State's educational potential needs to be broadened and explored

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

We note from previous studies and reports that nationally we are witnessing:

- A decline in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy.
- A decline in the senior secondary science subjects.
- Growing equity disparities between Australian schools. These disparities are increasing along socio – economic disadvantage.

Both nationally and in individual state jurisdictions (apart from Tasmania), we have witnessed a focus on:

- The importance of raising the status of teaching and improving the quality of teaching. There has been little evidence of this in Tasmania.
- A 'whole of state' approach to improving education outcomes along the lines of a recently announced NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan 2017-2020 which provides funding and support for all education sectors.
- The importance of the need to adapt to the changing nature of work and to the societal digital disruption impacting on learning.

Some general questions and observations relevant to the design of future Year 9-12 education:

- Are we sufficiently focused on quality and depth of subjects rather than quantity and breadth in senior secondary education?
- Do we challenge and support students with scaffolding for achievement and completion rather than 'opting out' of senior secondary education?
- How do we apply deep understandings of subject concepts and principles to real world problems?
- In an interconnected world why do we continue to teach the 'disciplines' in isolation from each other?

- How is our senior curriculum promoting creativity and problem solving and applied processes?
- Is our curriculum directed at the goals of the Melbourne Declaration or is it a production line for employers or higher education? How does the curriculum embed the importance of life long learning?
- If the curriculum is geared to the provision of a workforce, then how do we provide for employers who are seeking better information about students' abilities to work in teams, use technology, communication, solve problems and learn on the job?
- How do we mitigate against senior secondary provision being heavily influenced by traditional university admission measures at a time when mainland universities (not sure about UTAS) are discarding pre-requisites and seeking students by alternate methods of selection? The nature and recognition of learning is changing.
- Currently, our students learn largely in isolation and in competition with each other at a time when our workplaces are arranged around teamwork – we need a different set of skills and capabilities.
- In Tasmania, teachers largely shape our curriculum, which has lead to a broad selection of subjects within disciplines. Is this approach providing the best education for our students?

Curriculum priorities

- The importance of deep learning – not simply about factual and procedural knowledge.
- The importance of interdisciplinary learning.
- Understanding of view of individual 'progress' – our focus is currently on the end point rather than progress along a journey. Need to help students see the progress they are making - the importance of meta-cognition. Need to stretch our mindset around teach-learn-assess.
- Recognising new forms of individual's learning progression and achievements.

Future priorities:

In our Catholic tradition we talk of learning taking place in terms of 'head, heart and hand'. Education is not just about retaining knowledge (head) or developing skills (hands) but is also about compassion, empathy, and justice leading to well being (heart). Our goal as Catholic educators is the integral formation of the human person, which includes preparation for professional life, formation of ethical and social awareness, developing awareness of the transcendental, and religious education. As a consequence, our curriculum and instruction should foster the desire to seek wisdom and truth; the preference for social justice; the discipline to become self-learners; the capacity to recognise right moral action and the desire to transform and enrich the world with the love of Christ.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Access to quality data of Continuation and Retention

It is important that measures such as the Apparent Retention Rate, Apparent Continuation Rate and Apparent Progression Rate are collected rigorously across the State for all year cohorts but particularly Years 9-12. This data should also enable disaggregation with reference to the three education sectors in Tasmania. The ability for each sector to be able to track students moving from one school to the other within the sector or transferring to another sector would give greater precision and credibility to the measures.

2. Access to VET

We believe that our goal, as expressed in the Melbourne Declaration, is that all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. This will not be achieved without provision to meet the diverse needs of each Tasmanian child or young person.

Therefore it is critical that the Tasmanian Government reaffirms its commitment to Vocational Education in Schools (VETiS) and secondly a commitment to universal access to TAFE. In terms of retention, the Government needs as a practical measure to provide all Tasmanian students equal access to Vocational Education offered through TAFE while in Year 11 and 12. This will add to the relevance of senior secondary for those students who have traditionally sought employment after Year 10.

Our experience across VETiS and Trade Training Centres is that VET is a genuine career pathway which must be strongly supported by government policy and resourcing as part of Year 9-12 education in Tasmania. For the Catholic education sector, the engagement with employers in VET training is a powerful connection that is mutually beneficial to our students and employers.

The excellent relationship with employers involved in our programs through the provision of quality work placements enables students to work in industry-standard facilities with the focus on further aligning training to standards. The result is a high success rate with VET training and consequently, a high employment rate for our graduates which in turn benefits employers.

The importance of workplace learning must not be under-estimated. Consideration needs to be given to current time and resourcing issues facing schools to ensure that in future, Year 9-12 education structures will allow greater flexibility for students to gain expertise in industry as well as gain their TCE subjects as part of pathway planning.

3. General Capabilities

The current TCE requirements for proficiency in Literacy, numeracy and ICT have been problematic and have often led to a tokenistic treatment. We strongly advocate that the course structures in Years 9-12 should include important general capabilities, as is the case in the Australian Curriculum. Allied to this, in Years 11 and 12 it would be advantageous to have a variety of compulsory units of English and Mathematics that could be targeted to student need and avoid a 'one size fits all' requirement. At present, students can finish study in these areas at the end of Year 10, which is counterproductive.

4. Funding

The State Government has an obligation to all Tasmanian students irrespective of what education sector they are enrolled in. Catholic education would expect that policies and strategies for Years 9-12 that emerge from the current Review, need to be supported by equitable funding across the three school education sectors in Tasmania.

5. Broad Curriculum Priorities

We believe that any redesign of Yr 9 - 12 curriculum needs to be underpinned by

- A clear learning progression from 9-12 (if not K-12) that provides a common reference for establishing where students are in that learning progression at any given point of time
- Appropriate breadth and depth within curriculum offerings

- Real world relevance to present and future needs
- The ability for students to personalize their learning progression/pathways

We believe that students:

- Learn in dynamic and creative ways promoted through quality teaching and therefore attention must be given to undergraduate teacher education and teacher professional development based on the AITSL standards for teachers
- Should own their own learning and know how they are progressing and therefore attention should be given to curriculum design that builds this capacity
- Need to understand what is expected of them and therefore curriculum design needs explicit learning intentions and products
- Need multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do
- Should be offered a curriculum that develops knowledge, capabilities and values required for contemporary and future living

6. Cultural Change

While structural changes designed to create clear pathways and transitions beyond Year 10 are definite government priorities in the Tasmanian Education Bill, there has traditionally been an undervaluing of Year 12 completion (or its equivalent) in much of the Tasmanian community and even in schools.

While strongly applauding the focus on Year 12 completion proposed in the Education Bill, structural change will not ultimately be successful if not accompanied by a cultural or attitudinal change. Attention and resourcing needs to be directed by government and the education sectors to this difficult task. The previous ability to opt out of post Year 10 education and / or training has been profoundly counter-productive.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The challenge for us as a teaching profession is to reimagine the future. Can we dare to imagine how it could be different? Can we imagine the work of a teacher being different to that which we currently understand? Can we imagine leadership and what we expect of our leaders in schools and conceive their roles differently? Can we imagine new learning environments - when and where schools and learning take place?

Hattie, (2016) presents a powerful case to change the education narrative. Tasmania needs to change the narrative more than most, particularly around our understanding of what constitutes progress and achievement. As educators we need to stop talking in terms of 'meeting the needs of students' as this lowers our expectations and the expectations of students. What we need, is a societal view and a curriculum that helps students to exceed their expectations rather than reach their potential. As an education community we need a change of mind and change of curriculum that moves the debate away from progress to that of expectations of performance and achievement.

This reimagining is going to be critical going forward, because now, halfway through the second decade of the 21st century, we have almost exhausted our 19th century model of education.

The professional learning of teachers is an essential part of that process of being open to new possibilities - new possibilities to improve the quality of learning and teaching that is offered to our students.

We require a structured and systemic approach to curriculum that demands that teachers

- Collaboratively plan and evaluate learning programs
- Use student profiles and learning progressions to ensure that differentiation occurs
- Design quality assessments informed by the developmental needs of students and make consistent judgements about student learning
- Use feedback to students as a key part of the learning process
- Complete meaningful student reports which focus on what students know, understand and can do and how much they have grown in their learning throughout the reporting period

The reimagining of Tasmanian schooling – a vehicle for which is provided in the Review of Year 9-12 – will lie in the developmental work we have done and will do in collaboration with the wider community and our cross-sectoral educational communities. There is a need to focus the dialogue and discussion that opens up new possibilities. Not experimentation, but exploring possibilities using sound theory, good practice and evidence. We stand on the threshold of wonderful possibilities. If we don't open ourselves up to new possibilities then we will just continue the process of reinventing our 19th and 20th Century models of schooling.

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End of Submission