

## **Chair Report**

### **Catholic School Parents Australia**

### **Annual General Meeting**

### **24 Feb 2018**

#### **Introduction**

It is with some sadness that I present this my final report as Chair of CSPA Council. From the launch of CSPA in October 2013 till now I have greatly appreciated the privilege of being in this role. I am indeed deeply thankful for the opportunity but even more so for coming to know and appreciate the commitment of council members to Catholic education and to the central place of parent engagement in this great enterprise.

#### **Work of Council**

- I wish to commend our executive officer John O'Brien for his successful efforts to bring our strategic planning work to fruition and for initiating an ongoing process to ensure its values and priorities remain foremost in the minds of members of council.
- Similar affirmation can be made of John's leadership of our DET funded national project around parent engagement. Professor Sue Saltmarsh was present at our February 2017 council meeting in Sydney to assist us in ensuring CSPA met all the required ethical and research principles of good practice. John has developed a mutually respectful and clear relationship with key DET officials around the Project's logistics and ensured that council members have shared interview responsibilities. In this regard I wish to particularly acknowledge the work of Bernadette Kreutzer from the Queensland office who to date has conducted around 25 principal interviews and interviewed a total of 36 parents. Our thanks go to Carmel Nash for freeing Bernadette from her Queensland duties to undertake this work.
- 2017 saw CSPA take a position of national leadership around parent engagement. Apart from our Project partnership with ARACY, at least 6 members of council were key presenters at the ARACY national conference on parent engagement. One of the international conference keynotes was delivered by Dr Debbie Pushor who had first come to speak in Australia at the invitation of the Queensland Federation for their 2016 state conference. She spoke at our June council meeting and while here presented in each state and territory to our State and territory bodies. Members of Council also presented at the 2017 ACEL conference and the Cairns .... We were also able to congratulate Victorian council member Rachel Saliba on the publication of her book on parent engagement titled, *Staying Connected – Guiding and supporting children on their learning journey*, 2017.
- CSPA's close co-operation with NCEC continued. Then Acting Director and former CSPA deputy chair Ms Danielle Cronin was a guest at both our Sydney and Melbourne meetings

while Christian Zahra was a guest at our August meeting in Brisbane. In all instances the Federal Government's school funding policy was the focus of discussion. Deputy Chair Carmel Nash along with our executive officer met on a number of occasions along with representatives of the Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association and Catholic Secondary Principals Australia and various NCEC staff. This program will continue in 2018.

A note of concern was the comment by Christian Zahra that he did not think NCEC could continue to fund CSPA into the future. This is an important matter to be resolved in the near future and may also involve discussions with the Bishops' Committee for Catholic Education.

- Along with discussions around our DET funded project, CSPA took the opportunity to continue to develop our relationship with the Commonwealth Department of Education. Carmel Nash and John O'Brien had meetings with DET secretary Michelle Bruniges and deputy secretary Tony Cook. Tony also presented through teleconference to our 2017 Sydney Council meeting around school funding considerations.
- While CSPA is still seeking the opportunity to meet directly with Minister Birmingham and raise with him the question of the Government affording CSPA peak parent body status, the Minister referred to our national standing in his opening speech at the June 2017 ARACY conference and also invited us to be represented at a luncheon presentation by his UK counterpart. It is pleasing that The Hon David Coleman MP, Assistant Minister for Finance will be a guest at our 2018 February meeting of council in Sydney.
- Shadow Minister Tanya Plibersek issued an invitation for CSPA to be part of the Labor Party national forum involving key stakeholders that aimed to help Labor develop its alternate education policy including the vexed area of school funding. Ms Plibersek is a guest at our forthcoming council meeting in February 2018.
- CSPA was also invited to present to the Senate Select Committee on School Funding along with other key education stakeholders. For example, CSPA had representation on the National Career Education Strategy Working Group and very recently had a consultation meeting with Dr Alan Finkel following CSPA's submission in relation to the *Optimising STEM Industry-School Partnerships: Inspiring Australia's Next Generation*. It is pleasing that CSPA is invited to contribute in such forums.
- CSPA contributed to the Royal Commission with a thoughtful paper on safety for children and young people in our schools. We also appreciated the support of Truth, Justice and Healing executive officer Frances Sullivan who spoke at our council meetings on three occasions. He is soon to step down from his role and I know members of council would fully support a record of appreciation for his work in what has been a harrowing experience for our Australian Catholic Church.

### The Future

I take this opportunity to wish council well as it moves to welcome a new chair. There have been eight changes in council membership during the past four years. Some of these changes have seen members with significant experience of working in, and leading, the parent space in Catholic education step away from council. It will be important that all members of council are alert to the

challenge of ensuring high quality induction into membership of council and also being mindful of the need to have council's activities operate with a strongly, shared sense of social and intellectual capital. Leaving too much to too few must be resisted but at the same time considerations and decisions need to be the result of strong understandings and experience around key issues. This will be a key balance moving forward as the Council Executive and the Executive Officer brief and work with the incoming Chair.

### **Thanks**

I take this opportunity to thank all members of CSPA council that I have worked with over the past four years. By definition I have worked most closely with executive officer John O'Brien and deputy chair Carmel Nash. Their friendship, wise advice and hard work have ensured that my role as Chair has been well supported and hopefully helpful to CSPA. I commend both of them for their expert and committed work on behalf of CSPA. On behalf of CSPA I also acknowledge the special support of the Queensland Parents and Friends Federation. Without this support it is hard to imagine that these beginning four years could have been so successful.

I am pleased to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of my family in carrying out my work with CSPA and in particular thank my wife Andrea for her support and special forbearance as occasion required my absence from home. Her thoughtful advice also helped my responses to a range of issues that have been encountered along the way.

May God bless CSPA in the years ahead as it continues its strong and helpful leadership role in Australian Catholic education.

***Tony O'Byrne***  
***Chair***  
***February 2018***